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Sermons

W. Morley Punshon, LL.D.



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MANUEL



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SERMONS

BY THE

REV. W. MORLEY PUNSHON, LL.D.

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SERMONS

BY THE

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XXI.

THE GOSPEL.

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.”—Rom. i. 16.

THIRTY years had well-nigh passed away since the death of Jesus. During that period, the apostles, by the baptism of Pentecost invested with power from on high, had been assiduous and successful preachers of the Gospel. The call of Cornelius, and the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Gentile hearers of the word, had silenced their prejudices, and convinced them of the breadth and generosity of the purposes of God. Availing themselves of the wider range of influence which was thus shown to be accessible, they had declared “to Jew and to Greek” the unsearchable riches of Christ; and God had wrought with them mightily, confirming the word by miraculous signs, and by transforming wonders. There must be, however, a yet more signal triumph of the cross. The provinces of the Roman empire had been skirted with the tidings of redemption;—Rome itself must be visited, impregnated, and ultimately subdued to Christ. In order to this, there seems to have been a remarkable manifestation of the wisdom of the counsels of Heaven. The Apostle Paul was marked by qualification, and designated in purpose, to be the chief

advocate of the truth in the imperial city. Brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, trained in the most celebrated schools, well read in the literature of the day, and not insensible to its classic beauty, having had the experience of a considerable itinerancy, having the gift of tongues, and many other spiritual gifts rarer and more valuable, filled with indomitable courage, and, above all, mighty in the Scriptures, and a firm and loyal Christian — he was the very man to tell before Cæsar's seat, and to Cæsar's household, the grace of God in Christ. There seemed, however, in the way difficulties of no ordinary magnitude. From the time of his conversion until now, he had been followed by the inveterate malice of the adversary, whose usurped authority he was endeavouring to destroy. He had been, as he himself tells us, in sufferings and hunger, in perils frequent, in deaths oft. But the grace of God had sustained him; and, delivered out of them all, he went on in thankfulness and bravery. Now, however, in the moment of his extremity of peril, that grace is apparently withdrawn. He falls into the hands of his enemies, is bound with chains, impeached by his infuriated countrymen, and dragged degradingly from one tribunal to another. But mark the chain of events in their wonderful sequence and harmony. His peril was his most precious opportunity. Rescued by Lysias, the chief captain, from the clamours of the multitude, he lifted his fettered hands on the steps of the castle, and calmed that exasperated mob by his eloquent preaching of the Gospel. Brought up the next day before the council, and ordered authoritatively to answer for himself, his defence furnished him with

an opportunity—too glorious to be lost—for an earnest preaching of the Gospel. Transferred to Cæsarea, and arraigned at the judgment-seat there, three heathen princes were moved to shuddering and to thoughtfulness by his fearless preaching of the Gospel. Drafted on board ship, to a company of two hundred and seventy-six seamen and passengers, specimens from every nation—hemmed in from the chance of escape, and forced by their circumstances to attention—there was another preaching of the Gospel. And then in Rome itself—singularly favoured to dwell in his own hired house—for two years he published to all comers the mystery of Godliness—no man forbidding him.

How marvellous are the ways of God! The poor Apostle might have been unheeded and despised: the state prisoner, from the interest attached to his position, claims and receives a hearing. If he had come under other auspices, or impelled by his own zeal, the open door of utterance might not have been found; but, bound himself, he could reveal the true enfranchisement without let or hindrance. The very fact that he was within the jurisdiction of the higher court, freed him from the vexations and prohibitions of the lower. Neither Pagan priest nor Jewish scribe dared mutter opposition. He was out of their hands. He was Nero's prisoner now, or rather, as he himself expresses it, the "prisoner of the Lord;" his "bonds," therefore, "turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel;" and those circumstances, apparently so adverse, and surrounded by such invincible difficulty, became his very mightiest instrumentalities of triumph and of power. The Epistle to the Romans seems to

have been written by the Apostle as a sort of fore-runner of his coming. There was a church there already—a little band converted probably on the day of Pentecost, and holding their stedfastness, in the absence of a minister, by mutual counsel and prayer. He congratulates them on their loyalty and faith; assures them of his eagerness to visit the city of the Cæsars; and then—as if the thought had struck him that they might imagine that the truth which had purified licentious Corinth, and triumphed in classic Greece, might fail amidst imperial luxury and purple—he says, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

[Brethren, the Gospel, which won the confidence of that hero-heart, and fired the eloquence of that silver-tongue, is with us still—unshorn of its original beauty—unweakened of its original power—beating its strong and blessed life-beats in the hearts of thousands, and going on to the conquest of the world. It is for us to inquire into the grounds of our confidence and glorying, that while we admire the Apostle’s enthusiasm, it may excite and stimulate our own. We are not ashamed of the Gospel—

I. *Because it contains the most brilliant and harmonious developments of the perfections of God.*

The knowledge of God must necessarily be the most important of all knowledge. If there be such a Being, from whom we derive our existence, who has gifted us so richly with endowment and advantage, by whose sustaining grace we are preserved, to whose judgment we are all amenable, and who shall seal our

—written expository turned into 'study'

destiny for ever—[if there be such a Being, his character must be all-important to us; to comprehend him should be the one yearning of the mind, and to serve him the one practice of the life.] Now this knowledge of God must be matter of pure revelation. “Such knowledge is too wonderful for man; it is high; he cannot attain unto it.” His researches do not even conduct him to the notion of a God at all, much less can he descant upon his attributes, or realize his character. His reason, even in the metropolis of its enthronement, rears its altar “to the unknown God.” All ideas of the Divine nature will be found to be not innate, but traditionary. There are no characters carven on the infant mind by which, in riper years, the man can spell out of his own industry the letters of the Eternal Name. God has had both to originate and to sustain the notion of his own existence, and his infinite love has never suffered it wholly to perish, or the world would have been left in its own hopeless Atheism, to die. Here, then, is the excellency of the Gospel: that in it the revelation is clearer and more vivid than in aught beside.

[There are partial revelations elsewhere. There is a discovery of God in Nature. She has much to say of her Master and his name. The sky, with its all-enclosing dome, the sun in his strength, the watching host of stars, the mountains—broad-based and solemn, the earth enamelled in beauty, the chorus of winds and waters, the rivers in their flow, and the ocean in its unceasing chime, the woodlands with their foliage and minstrelsy, and the tribes of the animated in the hum and rapture of their life—how large the volume and

how full! How glorious the testimony to the power and presidency of God! And yet how partial after all is the discovery! This God, of whom Nature tells me—what is he? How is he affected towards me? Is there mercy with him, to control and temper his power? Does judgment or tenderness prevail in his administration? These are questions which nature finds no tongue to answer, or which she answers falteringly and in vain. That sky, so serene in its azure, is darkened by tempest. That ocean, so calm in its play, is lashed wrathfully into a thing of storm. Those woodlands, so glad in their summer-time, shrivel, and wither, and die. Those insect tribes, which flutter in the morning in the sunshine, their whole frames vibrating with life and pleasure, at eventide lie cold and dead on the leaf or in the stream. Where is the proof of mercy? Where are the tidings of forgiveness? There is no ease for a burdened conscience, no balm for a bleeding heart. Ah! nature is fair and she is eloquent; but her beauty is the beauty of the present, and her eloquence tells not of the recompense of heaven. Her volume has within it its Genesis of loveliness and its Exodus of sorrow, its Psalms, both glad and plaintive, and its Prophecies alike of warning and of resurrection; but there is no Gospel in it. It is the Old Testament which needs to be fulfilled and interpreted by the New. The record of pardon is wanting. The depth saith "It is not in me," and the sea saith "It is not in me." It is neither written by the sunbeam, nor chanted by the song-bird, nor wafted by the mountain breeze. Here it is that the glory of the Gospel of Christ is seen. It publishes

the tidings which you cannot gather from the universe beside — publishes them in freedom and in power. Here the whole Deity is known. No attribute infracts upon the province of another—they are all seen in individual distinctness, but in harmonious combination—justice that is inflexible, and wisdom that is unerring; dignity in its untarnished grandeur, and mercy so ample in its resources, and so boundless in its range, that it embraces and can save the entire family of man.

Is it *Justice* of which you speak? Where is it so effectually displayed as in the Gospel of Christ? In obedience to its principles and sanctions, God has on all occasions evinced his righteous displeasure against sin. We see it on the shores of the Red Sea, in drifted corpses and in battered armour. We see it in the cities of the plain, blasted in their rebel pride by Jehovah's kindled anger. We trace it in the waters of the deluge and in the fires of the torment-home—where prayer is ineffectual and mercy silent. But in each, in all of these, we have no such exhibitions of the justice of God as we find in the garden and on the cross. There is the sufferer, rent with wounds and racked with pain—darkness in the sky and deeper darkness in the mind—the blood flowing forth—the body writhing in extremest anguish—the chill and lonely sense of the withdrawal of the Father's presence—the last passion-cry—seeming as if in its enforced utterance it rent the very heart in twain, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And what is this? Oh! it is justice punishing the sinner through his representative and surety. It is justice sheathing

the sword in the heart of mercy. It is God's own Son enduring a weight of woe which none but Omnipotence could inflict, and which none but Omnipotence could bear. If I want to discover in their fulness either the justice of God or the enormity of sin, I must stand by the cross of Christ.

Is it *Wisdom* of which you speak? — the right application of knowledge — the selection of suitable means — and the attainment of ends by their beneficial uses. Where do you find it so worthily as in the Gospel of Christ? It is presented to us everywhere. In the green carpet of creation — in the provisions of the bountiful universe — in the adaptation of light to the eye — in the transmission of sound to the ear — in the mutual dependencies of nature — and in the rare and grand harmonies of material things; but its most surpassing exhibition hath abounded in the scheme of salvation. We can conceive of holy and happy beings subsisting in friendliness, and conferring offices of kindness on each other; but it was left to the wisdom of the cross to find out how — while justice relaxes not its claims, nor truth abates its sanctions — the guilty can be pardoned, and the lost be saved. We can conceive even how, in the abstract, mercy can pardon an offender, or justice punish his sin; but in no school but that of Calvary is it taught, how — while the principles of government remain intact, and the law is upheld, vindicated, magnified — the King yet delighteth to honour, adopts into his family, owns of his blood-royal, the very rebels who have spurned his authority, and tried to undermine his throne. That hill of sacrifice is the mount of wisdom.

In the cross, as in the person of Christ, are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Is it *Love* on which you dwell? The stream of goodness flowing out from its illimitable fountain? Where is its brightness of glory but in the Gospel of Christ? The world indeed is full of it. The fragrance which regales the senses, and the beauty which charms the eye—flowers in their wildering sweetness, and fruits in their ripening plenty—the spring-time in its promise and the autumn in its fruition—the glad laugh of children, those wavelets which dance rejoicingly on the surface of the ocean of life—the smiles of gathered friends—the father's pride and the mother's tenderness, and all the unutterable happinesses of home—all these are its manifestations, and though in fainter cadence and on a minor key, they are striking every day the one note of the world's high music, that God is love. But what are these compared to the exhibition of love in the sacrifice and atonement of Christ? Christ dying that we might never die! Death seizing on him, that life might be conferred upon us! Wrath descending on him who had never sinned, that mercy might encompass us who had done nothing else but sin! Here is a depth of loving-kindness whose fulness we must die to know, and the marvel of whose unsearchable and strong affection eternity itself will hardly be able to explain. We wonder not that the Apostle, when he would teach the love of God to man, does not take us to the summit of some lofty mountain and show us the fair landscape on which the smile of heaven hath rested. No, but to a far different scene: he takes us to the foot of

Calvary, on a stormy day, under a darkened sky, when night has climbed up strangely to the throne of noon, and there, when the forked lightnings gleam fearfully upon the cross, and light up the pale face of the brave and heavenly sufferer, and he says—“*Herein* is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Have we not established our position? Is it not true, that the Gospel is the clearest development of God? It is this which makes all other revelations available. When the Gospel of Christ has first awakened the man's soul, all nature becomes illustrative of God. There is opened for him the inner eye which no prejudice can darken, and the inner ear which no discord can bewilder. There in everything he can find spiritual meanings and tidings of the Holy One. He hears his name in the waving of the trees—drinks it in from each panting flower-cup—knows that the wild waves are saying it, and that in the dash of their billows

“There is a something greater,
Which speaks to the heart alone;
The voice of the great Creator
Dwells in that mighty tone.”

It is the Gospel of Christ which animates nature, explains the mysteries of Providence, fulfils and inspirits the visions of prophecy, realizes all types and absorbs all emblems, exhausts all figures, and flings down full in the face of the startled and yet hopeful world, the transcript and image of God. Yes! it is the Gospel of Christ! Let the philosopher continue his speculations, and the scholar vaunt of his learning;

let the sceptic roll himself, spider-like, in the web of his sophistry, which he has spun darkly in a corner; let the various builders of the world's great Babel disport and exalt themselves as best they may in their confusion of tongues;—we will not follow any or all of them in their devices of error; we cleave to the Gospel of Christ; and as we sit in its light, and feel how it takes the film from our eyes, and lets us into the secret of the Lord, and whispers to our hearts that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,” with the Apostle we affirm, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.” “We are not ashamed of the Gospel—

II. *Because of its exquisite adaptation to the necessities of man.*]

The necessities of man have never been altogether denied. Even the stoutest upholders of the dignity and perfectibility of human nature have drawn their pictures in the sunshine, and have based their theories under very favourable circumstances of advantage, and culture, and help. The Infidels, who have denied with well-affected indignation the scriptural account of the fall, have confessed that the race *is* fallen, and have set themselves to create or to provide a remedy. The grand objection of scepticism and worldliness is not to a Gospel, but to *the* Gospel of Christ. Hence the Gospel of Christ is not the only system which has been announced as the world's restorer. Regeneration has been often promised to it. The psalmists of fancied millenniums have abounded both in ancient and modern times. The prophets of scepticism have exulted to anticipate the speedy decrepitude of Chris-

tianity, and the erection upon its ruins of their cherished systems and schemes. We refer to this just now simply to impress upon your minds that the consciousness of the world's fall is deep and widespread; and that there is a strong desire for the trial of some ameliorative remedy, whose agency shall be omnipotent in its transforming and saving power. Now we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because we believe it to be the only instrumentality which—without an exception and without a failure—adapts itself to the condition of the race. It is adapted alike to man's *mental constitution*, and to the *wants of his moral nature*. Take the first thought.

It is adapted to his mental constitution. We need not remind you that there are in the world very diversified aspects of human society. It were difficult to imagine what the world might have been in social habits, intellectual culture, and the amenities of civilised life, if sin had never intruded itself into the primitive paradise. The fall, however, is a great fact; and it has induced and perpetuated the distinctions of polished and of savage. The population of the globe is almost infinitely diversified. There are the European and his descendants in their elevation—the wild and wandering Tartar and Arab—the inert and effeminate Asiatic—the hardy Northman—the Jew, in his unmistakeable individuality—the Mussulman tribes, enervated and superstitious—the debased and down-trodden African—the swarming millions of China, in the monotony of their embalmed life—how marvellous the variety in their culture, social state, moral habits, and religion! Analyze any one of these

tribes, and you will find in each a very considerable diversity of mind. The volatility of some will fly off from the involutions of an argument; the incredulity of others will yield only to well-sustained and consecutive reasoning. Some must be reached by pictures drawn on the imagination; others by motives melting the affections; others by appeals directed to the understanding. A Bible-poem or a Gospel parable has drawn many an imaginative mind, first to thoughtfulness and then to Christ; and on the other hand, the man of cautious thinking has revelled in the cumulative evidences of truth until he has added to them the evidence of consciousness, and, uttering the glad "Eureka" of conviction and delight, has become an earnest believer in the Jesus of whom the evidences testify. The orders of mind and the aspects of society are as various as geographical features, or as the height of the stature, or as the colour of the skin.

It is manifest, therefore, that the system which shall regenerate man must be a system which has within it an element of universality, which overleaps national distinctions, which addresses all orders of mind, which can uplift and transform, not a man, but a family; not a family, but a hamlet; not a hamlet, but a nation; not a nation, but a world. This universality is enshrined in the Gospel of Christ, and it can be predicated accurately of no other system in the world. Examine, if you like, all the systems of ancient or modern philosophy which have professed by their influence to make men wise and happy. You will find that they are all more or less national—tinged with the spirit of the age in which they rose, coloured

by the associations of the land from which they sprang. Carry them into neighbouring countries, you cannot acclimate them, they die like exotics in an ungenial clime ; let them live a century even on their own soil, they lose their strength, become palsied, and perish, dismally stricken in years. The same is true of the false religions by which the nations have abided. The systems of Paganism have been indefinitely multiplied. The idols of one country have been invoked against the idols of another. Each tribe of worshippers has championed the supremacy of its own. No single form of error has ever been universal. There has never been in the world's history a national exchange of one superstition for another. You could not instil into the Turk the philosophy of Confucius, nor bend him to the idolatry of Fo ; nor could you graft upon the Chinaman the imposture of Mohammed—his exalted faithful, and licentious Heaven. So pressing and painful has been the consciousness of failure in all existing systems, that a wholesale creation of divinities has taken place. They are born in every exigency ; they start up, ready-made and powerful, in every peril. The river is deified just before the vessel sails, for the preservation of the merchandise about to be borne upon its bosom ; the serpents are deified when the man ventures on a jungle-journey, that they may politely refrain from destroying their obsequious worshippers ; and the very thieves compose a deity before they start upon an enterprise, that he may bless and consecrate the plunder. The idols outnumber the worshippers, and the whole land of heathendom is "one rabble pantheon of gods." If you take the other

thought—the diversity in the orders of mind—you will find that amongst the most celebrated nations of antiquity they had one religion for the lettered and another for the vulgar—one for patrician, and the other for plebeian devotion. This was the case in Greece, and to a large extent in Rome. Many of the philosophers among them gave small heed to the unnatural and monstrous polytheism by which the masses were enthralled; while the masses, not to be behind in their contemptuousness, looked askance upon the systems of philosophy, and deemed them of no possible avail. The stoical philosophy—the chief maxim of which was that passive endurance of pain is the highest possible virtue—must necessarily have been limited to the cold-souled and phlegmatic amongst the people; the large classes of the sensitive, susceptible, and nervous were incapable, by their constitution, of such self-abnegation. The Epicurean system, in like manner, whose highest good was pleasure, would adapt itself to certain temperaments, and to certain temperaments alone. There was no catholicity of purpose, nor breadth of command among them. They exerted their contracted influence, and ruled their little hour; and they are gone—vanished from the world's presence, confined in the sarcophagus of ages, and only disinterred by the curious or speculative from the sepulchres of things that were. Sickened by the abortive efforts of these “human inventions,” we turn to the glorious contrast afforded by the Gospel of Christ. No national diversities arrest its progress or prevent its triumph. Its Pentecostal experience was significant of its universal sway—“Parthians, and

Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia," "they heard it speak in their own tongues the wonderful works of God." As it is intended for a world, so is it adapted for a world. Grafted upon the polity of a nation, it rapidly converts it to its own image and fibre. The Turk and the Chinaman are inveterate against each other's superstitions;—but you can make both Turk and Chinaman Christians; they have both bowed before the same consecrated cross, acknowledging its authority, and rejoicing in its power to save.

The Gospel has never improved upon its original revelation, nor amended its original plan. It borrows from no system of philosophy. It can subsist under all forms of government. There is no soil to which it is exotic—it is indigenous everywhere: only let it be fairly planted, and the frosts of the north cannot chill, nor the heat of the torrid zone consume it: a handful of its imperishable seed scattered on the mountain brings fruit which shakes like Lebanon;—"the wilderness and the solitary place are glad for it, and the deserts rejoice and blossom as the rose." It is also adapted to every class and order of mind. While some religions are suited to the ignorant and some to the cultivated, the Gospel of Christ is adapted to the intellect of every man. The sublimest truth of God is the simplest truth of God. Professing to be a revelation for man, it cannot of course forget that the majority of mankind are among the uninstructed and unlettered—the wayfarers in the journey of life; and it is a revelation especially to the benighted and the lowly. It subdues itself for their benefit into briefest

compass and plainest style, and the great truths of God's will and man's destiny are presented in language which tells upon the hearts of babes. It can be enjoyed with keen relish and fine susceptibility by the child in the Sabbath school, the miner in his drudgery, and the peasant at his plough. It bears with their infirmities, corrects their errors, allays their fears, inspires their hopes, and attends them on all the path of their pilgrimage—like a glorious angel furling his wing, and stooping from his elevation, that he may help up the trippings of infancy, or sustain the decrepitude and prostrations of age. While it thus bends in condescension to the lowly, it instructs equally minds of largest compass and profoundest thought. No elevation of intellect can tower above its sublimity; no acute investigator can detect it in error. The hours of eternity are reserved for the grasp of its fulness of meaning; and the student-seraph, as he pores over its pages of light, droops his wing wearily, and asks of God to give him time, and strength, and rest. Time would fail us to tell of the master minds of earth it has subdued. The Gospel of Christ! It has established its empire over minds themselves imperial, and constrained their acknowledgment of its divinity and power. Our noblest names in poetry and science have been loyal believers in Jesus. Those who have been inspired to catch the music of Paradise—to graduate the stars, and to unbraid the light, have sworn their fealty to the Gospel of Christ. This is the sight at which angels stand at gaze, when the philosopher and the Christian are one; when firm faith and humble dependence keep down

the vauntings of unholy pride; when amid caverns explored, planets discovered, trophies gathered, difficulties surmounted, triumphs won—there is still a consecration upon Calvary, and twin-brother in faith with the meanest peasant who has found the pearl of great price—there is a rejoicing over this as the sublimest discovery of all, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.”

So suitable to man in his mental constitution is this Gospel of Christ—“And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.” “We are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.” We preach it in its universality, and that universality includes *you*. Are you its subjects or its enemies? Have your minds learnt its lore, or refused to listen to its voice? We preach the Gospel of Christ. It is a message from God unto you. Do you ask for its evidences? They accumulate with every day: they are piling themselves up with every event of time. Travel where you please in the lands whose destinies were foreshadowed on the prophetic page, everywhere there is fulfilment—minute, accurate, lasting. Edom, Babylon, Nineveh, Syria, Jerusalem—they are all eloquent of evidence to the truth of the Gospel of Christ. The Jew in his individuality—in the world, but not of the world—present in all lands—incapable of fusion into the races of any—those tribes of the wandering foot and weary hand are a vast cloud of witnesses to the truth of the Gospel of Christ. The Romish apostasy, flaunting in its harlotry and in its pride, is a gigantic testimony to the truth of the Gospel of Christ. The Infidel, the while he denies it, bears its evidence

graven on his brow of brass, which all the world but himself can read. The apathy of the Church, the activity of the agencies of evil, the scantiness of the number of the faithful—all these—because fulfilled prophecies, are evidences of the truth of the Gospel of Christ. And when we ask, as we gaze on it in its breadth, in its amplitude, in its wondrousness, in its royalty, whose is this image and superscription?—there is a mighty swell of utterance from the past ages and from the present time, which says unto us—*GOD'S*. Brethren, try this Gospel for yourselves. Promise is prophecy: believe and you shall realize. Add to the other evidences the evidence of consciousness—the blest feeling of pardon—high intercourse with heaven—adoption into the family—everlasting life. Thank God, you may. It is free for all. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.”

It is adapted to the wants of man's moral nature.

There is a great difference in this matter between the Gospel and all other systems in the world. They have to do mainly with what is circumstantial and temporary; the Gospel almost entirely overlooks them, and selects for its attention those which are unlimited and enduring. It professes to comprise the supply of all the wants of mortals; but it goes upon an enlarged and magnificent principle. It does not, like false religions, become the empiric of the village, guard men against the disabilities of individual lot, charm away sickness by its talismanic power, or create on the spur of the moment a way out of every difficulty, and a joy in every trial. It renounces all forms of diabolism.

Fetish-spells and rain-making vanish at its presence. The sorcerers burn their books under its high and spiritualizing influence. It regards, and teaches its followers to regard, the world in its littleness, and its heaviest sorrows as the light afflictions of a moment, and it settles down with a broad and noble purpose to felicitate the pilgrim of the earth, by preparing him as a traveller to heaven.

Man is ignorant, and in the Gospel there is knowledge.

Sin has almost obliterated the knowledge of God, and of duty, from the human mind. The world is perishing for lack of it. Clouds rested upon the nations of old—unfringed and palpable darkness that might be felt. In reference to the future, there was no knowledge; conjecture instead of certainty, light glimmering through darkness, doubt enfeebling every conclusion, probability instead of assurance. The nations were in a midnight without a prospect of a dawn. And so it is yet, where there is the absence of the Gospel of Christ. “But when the star arose at Bethlehem, to beguile the dreariness of the long evening, and to pour its radiance on the path of life, Jesus explained what was ambiguous, established what was doubtful, elucidated what was obscure.”—Oh! there is no need to rest in darkness now—the day-spring from on high hath visited us, the Gospel of the world hath spoken—the sun has arisen in his meridian strength and splendour. Brethren, every yearning of your awakened mind, every aspiration of your moral nature, every question about your future destiny, are realized in the Gospel of Christ. “To you is the

word of this salvation sent." We offer you the Gospel as your guide through life, and your comfort in death. It will enlighten your ignorance, correct and sublimate your vague and dreamy notions, unswathe your spirit from the vassaldom of prejudice and pride, open up to your wandering soul the grand science of the heavenly, and let you in to God.

Man is guilty—the Gospel speaks of pardon.

That we are guilty before God we need not stop to prove. The fall has impressed itself in evidences too countless to be doubted; and our observation of the iniquities of others, and our experience of our own, fasten upon us the conviction that as by nature we are the children of wrath, so by practice we are the children of disobedience; "The wrath of God abideth upon us." We are exposed to his displeasure, compared with which the concentrated indignation of the universe would be as the harmless anger of a child. From this wrath to come we are naturally unable to escape. Repentance will not avail us—it can neither recall the past, nor avert the future. Penances, however severe, cannot atone for transgression. Sacrifices of costliness cannot purchase the forgiveness of sin. Tears, shed for ages, cannot wash the leprous soul, nor quench the penal fires. The vain confidences fail us; the hail sweeps away the refuges of lies; but the Gospel of Christ comes to the aid of our hopelessness with its glorious message. *Pardon!* "Let the echo fly the spacious earth around." *Pardon!* Sound it in the ears of the sinful, that they may rejoice, and of the lost, that they may live. *Pardon!* Go into the sepulchre with it, that it may wake some Lazarus in

his moral shroud ; speak it high and clear, that it may rouse the failing strength, and fire the glazing eye. *Pardon — Pardon for the guilty ! Pardon without money and without price. Pardon* for the guilty, for the lost, for all, for *you*. This is the Gospel of Christ. Call me fanatical, pity me as imbecile, brand me as mad ;—“ I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.”

Man is polluted—the Gospel speaks of cleansing.

You, at least, will not be disposed to deny the universality of this pollution. We know well enough that there are its more and less blameworthy developments. You may be able to point to amiable specimens of human nature : you may perhaps have seen disinterested friendship, the ardour of patriotism, inflexible principle, correct morality, decorating the character which has not yielded to the Gospel of Christ. Notwithstanding this, we weigh the man in the balances of the sanctuary, and he is found wanting. He is not restrained by the fear, nor actuated by the love of God. The motive which alone can consecrate the action, is not present with him ; he is therefore a child of wrath even as others. In the eye of God he is a sinner, and if he have no other dependence than these attractions of his character, he will be doomed at last among those who have lived without repentance and died without hope. Here is another excellency of the Gospel of Christ. It not only provides pardon—it carries on in the heart of the pardoned one, by the agency of the Spirit, the holiness which leads to heaven. All other systems promise impunity. That is neither the Gospel's promise, nor the Christian's aim. After it has freed the soul from the curse of

the strong man, it spoils the strong man's goods: it takes away the condemnation first, and then breaks the power of cancelled sin. It proclaims freedom as well as pardon. No man need be a slave now, bound in the chain of his corruptions and led captive by the devil at his will. Wherever he is, the Gospel comes to his aid. The glinting sunshine pierces everywhere; the dark is irradiated, the impure is cleansed, the earthly is exalted, the corrupt is transformed. Modern science has discovered that the sunshine is the most accurate and most rapid painter. And so it is: the light of the Spirit flashes down upon the soul in the very humblest of earth's humble dwellings, and there is painted on it in a moment the image and likeness of God.

Man is miserable—the Gospel makes him happy.

Misery and guilt are necessarily connected. The wicked are like the troubled sea which cannot rest. I need not, for my purpose, and I would not if I could, harrow up your feelings by a detail of the miseries of the world. I need not image the woe and wretchedness of toiling sons of want—pestilence impregnating the air with poison—war fertilizing the plains with blood. I need not unroof for your inspection the squalid habitations of poverty, nor bid you breathe the feculent air of prisons, nor show you the marks on the brow of the hunger-born where the hoof of the fiend has trod. In the search for misery you need not go so far. You have only to enter the heart of the unpardoned sinner, and you find it nestling there: sin is uncanceled, and therefore misery broods. I appeal to you, sinner—is it not true? Your conscience

slumbers sometimes, and you try to drown it in intemperance or company; but it is not dead—it is not dead—and ever and anon it dashes from your lips the untasted cup of pleasure, and appals you with the horrors of the life to come. I appeal to you, half-hearted and almost persuaded sinner—is it not true? You are halting between two opinions. You have too much religion to enjoy the world, and far too little to be happy in the church, and you are not happy; you know you are not happy. You have tried philosophy and pleasure, and taste and science, and even scepticism, and they are miserable comforters. Oh, I rejoice that I stand before you with the Gospel of Christ. Here is the balm—the vital and all-healing balm. The atonement which satisfied justice, can satisfy conscience too—the blood that took away the sin, shall allay the anxieties of the soul. Come to the cross. Come at once—come now. So shall you be enabled from heartfelt and exulting experience of its blessings to swell the full-voiced tribute, which by and by the ransomed universe shall render. “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.”

XXII.

KINDNESS TO THE POOR.

“If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him.”—DEUT. xv. 7, 8. “For the poor shall never cease out of the land.”—DEUT. xv. 11.

THERE is no need to remind you of the circumstances under which this command was given. It occurs in that grand valedictory service to which Moses, the great Jewish lawgiver, summoned the children of Israel, and in the course of which he repeated the commandments of the law, and urged upon them to be consistent and faithful in the land of promise which they were about to inherit. There was a pathos in his utterances—for he knew that he spoke his latest counsels to the people who had often tried him, who had often rebelled against him, but whom he loved with a love stronger than death. And there was also the deeper pathos of the remembrance that he, and the few elders who survived, had forfeited their own entrance into Canaan—and that by the decree of an unchangeable penalty each silver-haired ancient who had started from Egypt, and had been concerned in the condemning unbelief, must lay his

bones in the wilderness, while the speaker himself could but gaze in one brief trance of rapture upon the people's inheritance, and then lie down and die. In this farewell charge, which comprises the whole book of Deuteronomy, not only are motives to obedience pressed on them with overwhelming power, but circumstantial directions are given upon all matters connected with the establishment of their new life. There are denunciations of idolatry—the one crowning sin which was the cause of their sacred isolation—and then follow regulations touching the four great principles of theocratical government: 1. Worship and sacrifice; 2. The institution of the family, and its concurrent obligations; 3. The consecration of time, with the Sabbath as God's especial portion; and 4. The consecration of the substance, and its apportionment to the requirements of personal and family need—of legitimate business—of the sanctuary—and the calls of charity. In the last of these comes the injunction of the text. As if, by provident foresight, God had ordained the existence of the poor on purpose to be the check upon the rich man's selfishness, and the outlet for the rich man's bounty, it is predicted that they shall "never cease out of the land;" and the duty of the more highly favoured in regard to them, and the specialty of the claim upon the ground of a common nationality, are both included in the words I have read. And let no man suppose that the command is of any less obligation, or that it comes with sanction less divinely authenticated, because spoken from Hebrew lips, and addressed to one wayward people's needs. There is in many respects a close analogy

between our circumstances and theirs. We are not newly enlightened, the last trophies of some venturous missionary's toils, as were many of those to whom the apostles wrote; if there do linger about us any remnants of our Paganism, it is because we have cherished them for years, and habit has made us fond of the badges of our darkness and shame. We revel in the light which only dawned greyly on the former time; we dwell beneath institutions which will begin to cast forth shadows soon. To us it is fitting that the prophet's lips should speak; we may be aptly rebuked by the faithfulness of the seer's warning. The principles enunciated for the guidance of the Jewish people—so far, at any rate, as high religious ethics are concerned—are principles which must govern us to-day. This is an interesting service which has gathered us, a time when in the far country we evoke the memories of home, those deep-lying and long-lasting instincts which years have no power to stifle, and which even hard usage and all the buffetings of a pitiless world cannot utterly destroy. Here we summon our patriotism to prompt our charity—haggard strangers loom through the sea-fret, ever coming near to us with their cry of distress and need—and as they approach us through the parting mists, we find that they are brethren, heirs with us of glorious history and traditions which make the blood leap the fleeter through the veins—children of the dear island mother from whom our own breath was drawn, and who sits in sceptred state, shaking her tresses of freedom to the winds, and girt about in loving embrace by the arms of the triumphant sea.

It is an occasion, therefore, in some sort, of national concern and sympathy, and those especially who have named the name of Jesus, and so march under more sacred banners than that of the old Cappadocian hero, are bound to be helpful in their measure, that our good may not be evil spoken of, and that our religion, in one of its comeliest developments, may stand before the observation of men. No great elaboration is necessary to impress upon you the principles which the text embodies and enforces. The claim is that of the poor man within your gates, who never ceases out of the land, and the claim becomes the stronger because of the peculiar circumstance that the poor man is one of your brethren. Let us illustrate these thoughts for a brief while.

“God has made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell upon the face of the whole earth.” This is the announcement of a grand fact, which has never yet been successfully disproved. “One blood”—there is the distinct, individual unity of the human race; one family, though sundered by climate and language; one deep underlying identity, however chequered by the varieties of external condition. This relates man to man everywhere, makes all the world a neighbourhood, and founds upon universal affinity a universal claim. The old Roman could say, with a far-sighted perception of this great truth, “I am a man; nothing, therefore, that is human can be foreign to me;” and Christianity has exalted this sentiment into a perpetual obligation, and stamped it with the royal seal of heaven. This general law, however, must be divided into minor modifications, or

it will be practically useless. It is not intended to contravene nature, but to assist and regulate its affections; and if it be the world at large which is the object of pity, the very magnitude of the area will induce a mental vagueness, which will fritter away the intenseness of the feeling. That is a suspicious affection which attaches itself to nobody in particular, which makes no heart its centre, which brightens no hearthstone by its light. Its words may be loud and swelling; like the blast of March, it may sweep noisily about men's houses and drift the dust about in clouds, but they are conscious only of discomfort when it blows; they do not trust it; it "passes by them like the idle wind, which they respect not." Hence all private affections are recognised and hallowed, and are indeed the source from which all public virtues spring. They are not inconsistent with the love of the whole race; they prepare for it, and lead to it, and scoop out the channels through which the tributes of its bounty may flow. Who shall sympathize with oppressed peoples but the patriot-heart which rejoices in the sacredness of its own roof-tree, and in the security of its own altars? Who shall be eloquent for the rights of others but he who is manly in the assertion of his own? Who shall succour breaking hearts, and brighten desolate houses, but the man who realizes in daily up-welling the unutterable happiness of home? These two obligations, therefore, the claim of universal sympathy and the claim of particular relationships, are not incompatible, but fulfil mutually the highest uses of each other. God has taught in the Scriptures the lesson of a universal brotherhood,

and man must not gainsay the teaching. Shivering in the ice-bound, or scorching in the tropical regions; in the lap of luxury, or in the wild hardihood of the primeval forest; belting the globe in a tired search for rest, or staying through life in the heart of ancestral woods; gathering all the decencies around him like a garment, or battling in fierce raid of crime against a world which has disowned him, there is an inner humanness which binds me to that man by a primitive and indissoluble bond. He is my brother, and I cannot dissever the relationship. He is my brother, and I cannot release myself from the obligation to do him good. I cannot love all men equally; my own instincts, and nature's provisions, and society's requirements, and God's commands, all unite in reprobation of that. My wealth of affection must be in home, children, kindred, country; but my pity must not lock itself up in these, my regard must not compress itself within these limits merely—my pity must go forth wherever there is human need and human sorrow; my regard must fasten upon the man, though he has flung from him the crown of his manhood in anger. I dare not despise him, because there, in the depths of his fall, as he lies before me prostrate and dishonoured, there shines, through the filth and through the sin, that spark of heavenly flame—that young immortal nature which God the Father kindled, over which God the Spirit yearns with continual desire, and which God the Eternal Son offered his own heart's blood to redeem. Yes—there is no man now who can rightly ask the infidel question of Cain. God has made man his brother's keeper. We are

bound to love our neighbour as ourselves; and if, in a contracted Hebrew spirit, you are inclined to press the inquiry, "And who is my neighbour?" there comes a full pressure of utterance to authenticate and enforce the answer, MAN. Thy neighbour! Every one whom penury has grasped or sorrow startled; every one whom plague hath smitten, or whom curse hath banned; every one from whose home the darlings have vanished, and around whose heart the pall hath been drawn.

"Thy neighbour! 'Tis the fainting poor,
Whose eye with want is dim,
Whom hunger sends from door to door,
Go thou, and succour him."

I observe further, that the last clause of the text is as true to-day as in the time of its original utterance, the "poor shall never cease out of the land;" and although in this new dominion, with its large-acred wealth of soil, and comparatively scanty population, you can know nothing of the overgrown pauperism which is at once a fault, a sorrow, and a problem to the rulers of older states, yet here, as in every age and in every clime, there are distinctions of society in the world. It must be so from the nature of things; it is part of God's benevolent allotment, and of his original economy. He makes no endless plains, nor uniform mountain ridges. He has stamped his own deep love of beauty on the undulating woodland, and on the flower-sprent hill, and on the pleasant varieties of peak, and copse, and stream. A level creation were not the creation of God, and it is so with society. It has its inequalities of necessity; men may fret against them, but they cannot help themselves. Nothing can

alter the irreversible law; and if by the fury of some revolutionary deluge, all things were reduced to a drear level of waters to-day, you may be sure that some aspiring mountain-tops would struggle through the billows to-morrow. Society could not cohere as a union of equals; there must be graduation and dependence. God hath set the poor in his condition, as well as the rich, for "he that despiseth the poor reproacheth his Maker;" and the announcement of the Saviour, "The poor ye have always with you," is at once the averment of a fact and a perpetual commendation of them, as Christ's clients, to the help and succour of his Church. In the text, benevolence towards them is positively enjoined, and enjoined because of their abiding existence as a class of the community. Hence it has been well said, "Poverty is the misfortune of some and the disgrace of more, but it is the inheritance of most." There will always be those who will need and claim the friendliness of their fellows above them. Some by native energy, or favouring circumstances, will raise themselves in the social scale (and here are ampler opportunities than most other lands afford), but the mass will toil on through a lifetime in the condition in which they were born, with few reliefs and fewer aspirations, the mouth demanding and absorbing the ceaseless labour of the hands. There is that also in the constitution of society, which requires that the class from which the ranks of clamant poverty are recruited should be always the largest amongst us. The pyramid must stand upon its base. The wants of the population, naturally large, have been increased by the refinements

of civilisation. The poor are the stalwart purveyors to the necessity, and to the comfort, of life. Who shall say that in seasons of exigency they have not a claim upon the state they serve, and upon the charity (which is but the justice) of others; some of whom have risen from their ranks; some of whom have been enriched by their toil. Once recognise the relationship, and the claim will inevitably follow; the sense of service rendered and obligation created thereby will make that claim more sacred; and religion, attaching her holiest sanction, lifts the recognition of the claim into a duty which may not be violated without sin. "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." "Whoso seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Nay, Christ himself, once poor in the travail of his incarnate life, and therefore "touched with the feeling of their infirmities," adopts them as his own peculiar care, and pointing to them as they shiver in rags, or parch from hunger, commends them to his Church, that they may be warmed and fed, adding the benediction which is itself a heaven—"Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

There are, moreover, peculiarities in the poor man's lot, of which I may here briefly remind you, which tend to the enforcement of the claim which both reason and Scripture commend. Think then of the nature of the occupations in which so many pass their lives. It is true that there is an inherent dignity in labour. It is not, as some have erroneously supposed, a penal clause of the original curse. There was

labour, bright, healthful, unfatiguing, in unfallen Paradise. By sin labour became drudgery—the earth was restrained from her spontaneous fertility, and the strong arm of the husbandman was required, not to develop, but to “subdue” it. Labour in itself is noble, and is necessary for the ripe unfolding of the highest life. But how many are there to whom the days pass in dreary monotony, with little to task the intellect, to engross the affections, or to call into play the finer sensibilities of the man! It is “work, work, work, as prisoners work for crime.” The man within the man is degraded by the unintermitting toil; the task-work is performed, the holidays come but seldom, and when they do come, he is too listless to enjoy them. Day after day rolls wearily along, and there is no prospect of retirement; a family grows up around him, and the children are clamorous for bread. Each morning summons him inexorably to labour; each evening sets un pitying on his weariness. The frosts gather upon his head; the lithe limbs lose their suppleness, there is a strange sinking at the heart, but he must work, until at length infirmity disables him; then he dies, and his wife is exposed to the cold world’s buffetings, and his children to a stranger’s charity or an early grave.

Think again how the poor are circumscribed from many ordinary sources of enjoyment. Though sin has sorely afflicted humanity, there are yet open many sources of pleasure, and from books, and friends, intellectual conversation, and taste, and rambles among the flowers, or the woodland, or on the pine-clad hills, or by the fringe of the living sea; as well as from

those exercises which belong to Christian fellowship, benevolence, and enterprise, there can be realized a rapture which mitigates the curse and which leaves no remorse behind. But from many of these the poor are, by the necessities of their position, debarred. They do not start fairly with their fellows in the race of intellectual acquirement. To them, as a rule, the sciences are sealed. It is but rarely that they can kindle before a great picture, or travel to the spots renowned in song or story, or be thrilled beneath the spell of a great poet's mighty words. Not for them the pleasures of sense, the ample board, the convenient dwelling, the gathered friends, the appliances of comfort with which wealth has carpeted its own pathway to the tomb. Their life is a perpetual struggle between the winner and the spender; and unless they are happy at home, and blessed by the consolations of religion, existence will be a joyless pearl, a weariness which ceaseth not, or if there be a respite, it will be one which gives "no blessed leisure for love or hope, but only time for tears."

Think again of the pressure with which the ordinary ills of life fall upon the poor. There is no part of the world where the curse has not penetrated. Man is born to trouble amid Arab hordes, and in Siberian wilds, as well as in royal courts and teeming cities. The cloud, like the sun, is no respecter of persons. Everywhere disappointment tracks the footsteps, and sickness steals into the dwelling, and death waiteth at the door. But these ills, common to all men, fall most heavily upon the poor. They have to bear the penalty in their condition as well as in their expe-

rience. They cannot purchase the skill of many healers, the comforts which soothe the sickness, the delicacies which restore the strength. They cannot afford the time to recover thoroughly, for effort is required to keep ahead of the world, and to the quickened apprehension there are many visions of the wolf of hunger glaring in through the panes of the uncurtained window. Their very maintenance is dependent upon contingencies which they can neither foresee nor control. Their prospects in life, their hopes of supply, their only chance of provision for emergency, are derived from their labour. That labour is contingent upon the state of trade, upon the measures of Government, upon the yield of harvest, upon the price of money—sometimes upon the caprice of their employers, sometimes upon the coarse tyranny which they exert over each other, and sometimes even upon the thoughts, purposes, and quarrels of a people whom they never saw, and from whom they are separated by a waste of water upon whose breast they never cared to sail. If labour fails, bread fails and hearts fail. The more provident can struggle for a while on the results of their thrift and care, but if the scarcity be protracted, and if no friendly succour interpose, you can trace the inevitable progress downward. The little savings for which the industry of the past had toiled, and on which the hopes of the future rested, are frittered away to supply the need which will not wait; the cottage comforts vanish one by one, and there is a sickness at the heart as they go, for long habit has made them grow up into familiar friends, until in extremest desolation the picture of the poet is realized:

“A shattered roof—a naked floor,
A table—a broken chair !
And a wall so blank, their shadow they thank
For sometimes falling there.”

Then sickness comes—the fever follows hard upon the famine. The comfort is gone—the strength is gone—the hope is gone. Death has nothing to do but take possession. They have neither power nor will to resist him. Not hopeful, but sadly, strangely, terribly indifferent, they await his approach, and if you tell them of their danger, they might answer in the words of the strong and gentle spirit from whom we quoted before :

“But why do you talk of Death ?
That phantom of grisly bone.
We hardly fear his terrible shape,
It seems so like our own.”

And this is no fancy sketch or fevered dream. There are homes of your countrymen where the ruin is in progress to-day.

I enlarge no further but to remind you that there is a specialty in the case of those for whom I plead, in that they are at once “strangers, and of your brethren”—of the one blood, but in a strange land. In many aspects, the lot of the emigrant is a painful one. However, if he attains a position in a new country, he may become proud of its institutions and rooted in its soil ; the parting from the home of his youth cannot be without a pang. Even those who come, blithe venturers for fortune, under the patronage of youth and hope, own to the first feeling of desolation as they realize the stranger’s loneliness ; and when,

as in many cases, the emigration has been constrained by adversity, and the man must part perforce from old associations, and friends, and belongings—there is a cruel wrench of the tenderer fibres of the soul; and if, in addition to the regretful memories of the past and the sickening sense of homelessness, there be the forebodings of an uncertain future—and the fear comes creeping over the spirit of exhausted means and a pining family; of the want which is a deadly tempter, and of the hunger which is a sharp thorn; oh, that is a condition surely of extremest need, and, I tell you, a word of kindness in such a strait is welcome as the smile of an angel, for it may redeem from hopelessness and despair; and a helpful hand-grasp, with something in the hand the while, is worth a hundredfold its cost, for it may have ransomed for all future time the most kingly thing on earth, *the manhood of a man*, for industry and society and God.

I do not know much about the real or mythical personage—I am unable to determine which—who, alleged to have been born in some Cappadocian fastness, has been adopted as the patron saint of England, whatever that may mean. I cannot separate the fact and the fable. I know not whether or no he slew the monster who is represented to be transfixed by his spear, and delivered some fair Princess Aja, beautiful exceedingly, from durance or from doom; but I know this, that in the heart of this legend there are underlying symbols of the Christian warfare in which all who love the Lord Jesus should be valiant for the truth upon the earth. What is our lifework but to release, in ourselves and in each other, the

maiden graces of the Christian character, which have been in bondage to the tyrant of the Fall? What is the work of our religion but a warfare with the dragon—that old cruel serpent who still creepeth to empoison and destroy? Sirs, if ye would not shun the plainest meanings of the symbols under which ye gather, embody these teachings in your lives. Let your daily experience show that you have learned this secret of life, that it is not a mere provision for the flesh to fulfil the lust thereof—that it is not an hour of idleness, to be wasted “in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness, in strife and envying,” but that it is a stewardship to be accounted for hereafter—an earnest gift, full of earnest longings, and tending to earnest ends—something to be given primarily to Christ, who redeemed it, and for his sake to be employed for men. Let your religion be the base of your character, and there will be a goodly superstructure of enterprise and patriotism and charity.

It is right that on this occasion you should remember the land of your birth or of your fathers. The pride of patriotism is a pride that is not unholy. Not in vaunting but in thankfulness—not captive by the rivers of Babylon, but happy in the beneficent outgrowth of ancient blessings on the soil of a new dominion; the descendants of the dear old mother isle gather in this fair Canada—the comeliest of her daughters—to recall her advantages, and to be generous to her fugitive sons. She is worth all our love and pride. Secure from invasion, prolific in produce—of tiny extent, but of tremendous influence—a speck upon the world’s charts, but an emperor in the

world's councils—the school of the wise and the home of the free—her sails whitening all waters, and in all latitudes her flag flying upon some fringe of coast—girding the globe with her possessions, and owning archipelagoes of isles—while, as the late national thanksgiving proved, in the remotest dependency there throbs the great heart-pulse of home, “She is the anointed cherub that covereth, and God hath set her so.” But not in these things are her safety and her strength; they are in her equal laws and national honour, in the fact that, over cottage and palace alike, the ægis of the constitution rests, and in that all the machinery of justice is set in motion to protect the peasant's home, if high-born wrong assails it; and to guard the beggar's conscience, if he but fancy it aggrieved; above all in her adhesion, though imperfectly rendered, to the Gospel of Christ, and to the grand principles of morality, and charity, and godliness, which that Gospel has established among men. Let her decay from these, let there come corruption in her high places, the repudiation of national honour—the reign of encroaching error—the supremacy of a fell infidelity in the national mind—and her condemnation will not slumber, and, with her proud fore-runners in empire, her greatness will be forgotten as a cloud. Let her hold to these great principles, widening through the ages into increasing reverence for truth, and peace, and God, and her greatness shall be assured until the last fires blot out the sun.

“ This England never did, nor ever shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror ;
But when it first did help to wound itself,

Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue,
If England to herself do rest but true."

Dear Brethren,—To the duty which awaits you, you need not be further urged. Your countrymen, forced to stranger shores by blighted hope and ruined fortune. *These* are our clients. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me." *This is our divinely furnished argument.* "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor." *This is our example.* "She hath done what she could." *This is to be the measure of our giving.* "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord." And look! "What he lendeth, he will pay him again." *This is our surety.* "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." *This is our exceeding great reward.*

XXIII.

THE CHOICE OF MOSES.

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter ; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt : for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.”—HEB. xi. 24-26.

THIS is a very remarkable chapter, a gazette extraordinary, in which are blazoned forth the names of the good soldiers of the cross, who, in many a field of holy war, have bravely fought and won ; a gallery of heroes, consigning their deeds of daring to an exulting immortality, and gravating them upon the page of inspiration for the stimulus and benefit of universal time. Among the worthies who are thus immortalized, Moses holds a conspicuous position. His whole life was a wondrous and instructive history. Miraculously preserved in his infancy, bred in the singularly ungenial atmosphere of a court, surrounded by the refinements of luxury, tempted by the pageantry of honour, allured by the glittering heritage of the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, he vindicated his nationality, his patriotism, his reason, his religion, by “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”

There is much in the choice of Moses—considered as the deliberate preference of a thoughtful mind for matters of highest moment—upon which we may dwell with profit, and which may be regarded as an indication of duty to ourselves. In its bearing upon our own interests we will for a while meditate upon it, noticing some particulars:—

- I. *As to the choice which he made; and*
- II. *As to the motive which influenced his decision.*

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” It is easy to read this passage, and even to have some dim appreciation of its statements, without entering fully into the marvel and meaning of the words. But if you carefully consider it, you will find it to present to us one of the most extraordinary acts of deliberate renunciation of the worldly, and deliberate preference for the spiritual, which the world has ever known. It is equally wonderful, whether you look at the things which he sacrificed, or at the things which he preferred. The adopted of royalty—the dweller in a palace—the well-instructed student of Egyptian wisdom—luxury loading her board at his bidding—pleasure waiting for his presence at her revel—within his grasp the sceptre of the most ancient and wealthy monarchy in the globe. It was surely no light thing to renounce a heritage like this; and there

must have been, to constrain his decision, motives of irresistible power. Your wonder will increase, if you remember for what he made the sacrifice. He chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." His countrymen were broken-spirited and crouching slaves. They were neither wealthy nor noble, neither intelligent nor manly. They had been so long in bondage that they were hardly fit for freedom. They could not strike for liberty; they could only lament their lot in the hopeless complainings of despair. With the spirit of bondsmen they strove against each other—the slave became a tyrant to his fellow-slave; and when Moses first entered upon his mission as their deliverer, they resented his interference, and turned from him sullenly and jealously away. But in spite of their poverty and of their degeneracy, they attracted to themselves the affection of their brother of high degree; and he came down, without regret or faltering, that he might be their liberator from bondage, their lawgiver in the wilderness, and their leader into the fruition of the promised land.

It is said, moreover, that he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." He was influenced in his choice by the promise of a Messiah, which God had given unto Israel. The Israelites, descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were heirs of the promise which had been spoken of God unto their fathers; and they held it as a belief, talked about it in familiar conversation, interwove it in their acts of worship, rejoiced in it as a hope im-

mortal. Long years would elapse, they knew, before the advent of Shiloh; numerous fluctuations would agitate their political existence; the fulfilment of the promise would be long deferred; prophets and kings would long with exceeding desire to see the day of the Anointed One, but would die without the sight; and yet the grand expectation was cherished through all varieties of circumstances—at once a reliance shrined in the heart, and a motive mighty in the life. One can easily imagine how the Egyptians, that race of proud idolaters, would regard the existence of such a hope with incredulous and scoffing wonder; and that any one could be found to barter a high position and glittering prospects for a dream so uncertain, would be an event that hardly anything could enable them to realize. And yet such was the influence of this promise, and the preciousness of this wealthy hope, that Egypt's gold had lost its power to allure, and the treasures of Rameses and Succoth were trash in the comparison. It is worthy of remark, also, that this choice was made "when he was come to years." It was not a romantic eccentricity of youth, whose heedlessness knew not the inheritance it hasted to forego. It was not a remorseful resolution of the sated worldling, revenging himself upon the world which had cheated him of hope and happiness. It was not a momentary petulance of enfeebled age, in whom time had dulled the brain and blunted the sensibility of enjoyment. "When he was come to years"—in the vigour of his lofty intellect, with his hopes bright and his passions high; when there flashed upon him, through the radiant perspective, visions of beauty and

of power—then, with the crown of his manliness upon him, he chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.”

There are, in this choice of Moses, the true principles of the philosophy of Christianity. His preference should be the preference of us all, if our hearts were rightly attuned, and if we had a proper and realizing estimate of the comparative value of the two worlds with which we have to deal. There is involved the recognition of the *future* as higher than the *present*—the preference of the *spiritual* to the *secular*, when their respective interests come into collision; and to have a right estimate of both, and to secure an equitable adjustment of their several claims, is the great problem of human life. If we look into ourselves, and consider our own constitution, we find that we are placed in relations, by our diverse nature, to two very different economies. We have duties, interests, obligations, to the present world; there are claims, sanctions, authorities, which appeal to us from the world to come. In both cases our relation is involuntary and indispensable. There are duties of the present which compel our attention; we cannot neglect the future without loss and shame. The highest piety consists in the due appointment of our affections and of our interest, so that while our material duties are properly discharged, our grander relations to the spiritual are regarded as more important and absorbing. It will be obvious that the just harmony and propor-

tion of these feelings will, in this present state of being, be very difficult to maintain. The present world appeals to our senses, and has a manifest advantage. We can only dwell upon the future by an effort of thought and of faith. Even in the best state of moral existence, had there been no bias to the sensual, to have worthily regarded the future would have required both divine influence and unremitting personal endeavour. How immense the difficulty now, when our heart goeth after evil, and we are partakers of the corruption and degeneracy of the fall! It is desirable, in order that we may rightly fulfil the requirements of the divine law, both as to the life that now is and as to that which is to come, that we have proper apprehensions of our actual duty.

We read in Scripture, among the deliverances which Christ works for his people, "Christ hath redeemed us from this present evil world." If the apostle would describe a carnal and apostate professor, it is in these words: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world;" and the love of the world and the love of the Father are represented as in direct antagonism: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." How are we to understand these passages? What is that world our attachment to which is forbidden? Some theologians have fanatically argued from these, and similar expressions of Holy Writ, an absolute indifference to all earthly things, and have staggered the thoughtful mind by suggesting inconsistency in the creation of God — a palpable variance between our condition and our duty. Hermits have written thus from the solitudes of their mountain-

homes ; mystics in their raptures have echoed the sentiment ; and sometimes pious men, morbidly sensitive to the craft and hollowness around them, have shaken themselves loose from the trammel, if haply they might rise to freer thought and holier life. But they are neither friends to the progress, nor exponents of the spirit of Christianity, who thus think and teach. The material world around us is, rightly considered, a manifestation of God. Natural laws and fitnesses are but the impressions of his hand. Though sin has defiled everything, nature has not lost all her original comeliness, nor that beauty which blushed upon her face when her Maker proclaimed her "very good." The lightning speaks not all of electricity, but something of eternity. The hoary mountains tell us not so much of granite as of God ; and there is worship from those cathedral hills where the woodlands send forth their spirit-psalm, and "the wind, that grand old harper, strikes his thunder-harp of pines." The purple vintage and the waving forest, the bending harvest and the "flowers, which are the stars of earth"—what are they but a fruitful apocalypse of God ? Oh, surely it is wrong to suppose that God has placed us in our present condition by mistake ; that we are to look upon the world as a perpetual temptation ; and that when its beauty delights, or its music regales us, we are to shrink away from it with loathing as though it harboured the serpents of our fall ! Brethren, in so far as we have forgotten the present in our eagerness to impress men with the future, we have done disservice to our own cause. This world *has* a voice, and it will make itself heard. There are claims of

the present, and it were folly and sin to disregard them. It is by comparison chiefly that we are "to set our affections on things above, not on things of the earth." Health is a precious blessing, and we must take concern and give diligence to ward off disease, and screen ourselves from harm. Friends shed light upon our homes, and they appeal to our sympathy and tenderness. We and they must live, and we must toil in business—feel its anxieties, endure its privations—for their sakes and for our own. We are citizens, and must be patriotic. We are neighbours, and must be social. We have minds, and we must discipline and cultivate them. There are in the world intellect, imagination, logic, wit, eloquence, and each must have its theatre and its sphere. We have hearts—and there are poor to be relieved, and ignorant to be taught, and erring to be reclaimed, and solitary to be set in families, and all the operations of divinest charity to be undertaken and sustained. In these and many other points, it is obvious that our relations to the present are of an intimate and inevitable kind. "I pray not," said the Saviour, and his prayer for his people was always comprehensive of their highest good—"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." There is great significance in the fact, that when the man out of whom the devils had been cast not unnaturally besought Jesus that he might be with him, Jesus sent him home. He was not to wander about the world in a life of rapture and idleness, but to inform his ordinary existence with a religiousness which it had lacked before, and to exhibit

in the circle of his home a habitual and painstaking piety. So it is to be with ourselves. God has given us bodies of exquisite construction—"fearfully and wonderfully made"—and his merciful religion enjoins us to the care of them, and forbids us to do ourselves harm. God has given us friends to sparkle upon life, that our deep wealth of love may find an outlet, and not be wasted on the desert sands. God has allotted us to toil for the bread which perisheth; and when lawfully undertaken and followed in regulated measure, there is something holy in *work*, and a man's business may be his religion. Do not, I charge you, go away with the idea that godliness demands, or need sigh for, as speedy a deliverance as may be from this present life. Oh, believe me, it is a beautiful thing to live! This earth were heaven, with sin absent and the Saviour revealed unto the soul. Only let all things be infused with the transforming Spirit of God, and the common becomes the consecrated, and coarse things flash out into archangel beauty. In the field at eventide there may be as intimate communion as in the fellowship of saints; the shop may be as sacred as the sacrament; men may worship as devoutly in the mill as in the minster; heaven will be reached as easily if men die at the counter, as if they had died in the church; and with a holy purpose and an indwelling Christ, creation will be one vast temple, boundless as our wonder, whose quenchless lamps the sun and moon supply.

It is not, then, the objects that surround us, but the spirit of our own minds that constitutes us worldly, or otherwise; not nature, nor friendship, nor life's

activities that are forbidden, but our inordinate affection—cleaving to them to the neglect or postponement of far higher things. The flesh is innocent; the insatiable, eager “lust of the flesh” is sin: the eye is the chosen avenue for the inlet of beauty to the soul; the “lust of the eye,” the excessive attachment to the outward and the sensuous, is sin. Life is a pleasant and a holy thing; the “pride of life”—the outgoing of the spirit after carnal pomps and shadows—draws down the soul from the great and solemn purpose of its being.

It cannot be denied that multitudes whom we address are chargeable with this undue attachment to the present—grasping eagerly at immediate advantage, and banishing all thought of the hereafter in the engrossing solitudes of the NOW. But this is a grievous wrong done to an immortal nature; and “how can men do this great wickedness and sin against God?” While this world has its claims upon us, so has the other—claims more transcendent and abiding. While men demand from us reciprocal love and duty, God the Creator, the Preserver, the Redeemer, asks for the homage of our hearts. The future claims pre-eminence over the present, the spiritual over the secular, in our thought, our purpose, our life. Brethren, how is it with ourselves? Seems the choice of Moses to us a foolish or a praiseworthy thing? When the heart goes out after some temporal business, or some object of earthly desire, can we say, “More eagerly do I desire the things that are above”? Should we rather suffer the loss of fortune than the loss of grace, bereavement of friends and gladness than declension in God’s favour,

or the darkening of the light of his countenance? When the life-wine sparkles in the cup, and the cup brims over with exuberant joy, is the thought rude and painful which flits with us to heaven, or do we feel that after all—

“There is our house and portion fair,
Our treasure and our heart are there,
And our abiding home”?

When our pursuit of earthly good gets too eager, do we pause and pray, lest the thoughts of eternity and God and Jesus be jostled out of their rightful position in our hearts? Brethren, let us examine ourselves. Go into your hearts to-day, and candidly ask yourselves whether the reproach of Christ, or the treasures in Egypt, be to you the greater riches? If you are absorbed in the world that now is, and have banished from yours the world that is to come, you have sinned. If you have endeavoured to make unworthy compromise between good and evil, to divide a worthless service between God and Mammon, you have sinned. If with both occasionally in mind you have subordinated the spiritual to the earthly, instead of baptizing the earthly with the spiritual, you have sinned; and to each and all of you, who are in such a case, I would come with the words of warning, solemn now as when they were originally denounced, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

II. The motive which influenced his decision is presented in the words—“For he had respect unto the

recompense of the reward." The recognition of a future state, with its allotments of delight and doom, is frequently recorded in Scripture as exerting a powerful influence on human conduct. It was the hope which sustained Job amid the glimmering revelations of that early economy—"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Paul was strengthened by it for the endurance of the light afflictions, which it assured him were the outworkings of an "eternal weight of glory;" and our blessed Redeemer himself owned its power, and in some sort hallowed it as a motive of action, when he, "for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

1. We observe, first—*It is certain.*

There have been, you are aware, two opposite answers given to the question, What is man? Some have maintained that he is a mere material organization, and that when he dies he sinks into annihilation, and is like the brutes that perish. Others affirm, that besides the material organization, there is a rational and thinking soul, endowed with volition and with the power of choice, and with immortality; and that by consequence man is responsible for his actions, and enters, on his removal from this world, into an impartial and final retribution. There is much evidence apart from the authoritative declarations of the Divine Word, by which this latter view is sustained. Into the details of such evidence we

cannot now largely enter; but we might remind you of the universal consent of men in all nations and ages — a sort of latent but ineradicable conviction, of which we can hardly predicate whether it is a tradition or an instinct. We might remind you of conscience, the God within the man, pronouncing its decisions of condemnation or acquittal, exciting the spirit with the hope of heaven, or rousing it to alarm of the horrors of perdition and despair. We might remind you of the uniform structure of all human governments, which are founded upon the sanctions of reward and punishment. We might remind you of the inequality of distribution here, which seems to point, not to the injustice of God, but rather to the incompleteness of the present, as a dispensation of his government, requiring another state and another arbitration, to prove his eternal love of right and hatred of sin, and vindicate the ways of God to man. But besides these collateral evidences, which have great weight and force, the chief source of testimony is given to us in the word of God, which in a long series of passages gives to us the doctrine in its own impressiveness and majesty. Though in early times, the revelation—the written revelation—was comparatively obscure, there can be no question that both in Patriarchal and Levitical days eternal realities were present to the minds of men, and were the objects both of hope and fear. The development of the truth in its grandeur was, however, reserved for the Gospel of Christ. The veiled and the shadowy then passed away, and “life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel.” In the gospel the truth is

brought home to us that we do not live unobserved or unchallenged; that the present is a probationary existence, intended to introduce to the higher blessedness of being; that our thoughts and words and works do not terminate as they float along the brain, or as they characterize and mould the life; but that there is an eye, sure, silent, sleepless, by which they are marked and scrutinized for the judgment, and that "every one of us must give account of himself to God." The precept is more impressive because enforced by this appeal; the doctrine is hallowed by the abidingness of this issue; the threat is more terrible in its thunder, and the promise distils more fragrant balm of blessing, because of this unalterable certainty, that beyond the changing present there is a "recompense of reward."

2. *It is complete.*

The retribution of which we speak is comprehensive of the entire man. Body and soul are to be united, and to spend their eternity together. The completeness of the future state seems to have been purely a revelation of the gospel. There were loose and vague ideas of resurrection which had uncertain lodgment in the minds of heathen nations; sages and philosophers guessed at a future which they could not descry; the thought had traditional currency among the opinions of all peoples upon earth, but all had reference to the separate existence of the spirit only. Elysium and Tartarus were the haunts of shades. That the body should rise seems never to have entered into sage's speculation nor into poet's

dream. Indeed, if it had been suggested to them, they would have deemed it a degradation to a spirit so lofty to be trammelled in its immortality by an adjunct so corrupt and so defiled. The gospel is the only system which comprises in its benefit man's entire nature, not only stamping sublimity upon the soul, but ennobling the dull material of its earthly residence. And "why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" If the work of resurrection had been ascribed to any finite agent, any being of limited influence or bounded power, we might have doubted and denied—but is it too hard for God? It is an amazing act we acknowledge—but does it overpass Omnipotence? Who can think so, living as we do in a magnificent creation, mighty and marvellous beyond the grandest conceptions of the soul? To create must of necessity be more difficult than to compile. In the one case, the materials existed, though in rude and fragmentary forms; in the other case, the materials were not, and must be brought out of nothing by the word of power. He who peopled the solitudes of space, and poised the mechanism of the firmament, and scattered the harvest of stars, and quickened the tribes of men—what can be difficult to him? Take a survey of the works of creative power; dwell upon the numberless forms of matter, all replete with beauty, and upon the numberless hosts of the intelligent, all instinct with animation; and you cannot doubt that he, whose are all this costliness of architecture, and all this rapture of life, can easily reanimate the dust from which he has withdrawn the vital principle

before. Absolutely, when you think of creation, resurrection ceases to be wonderful; and I would tell the scoffer or the materialist—who speaks of the disorganization of dying, and of the putrefaction of the sepulchre, and of the difficulties of gathering the scattered dust strewed on the waters or charred in the flame, and who thus magnifies the obstacles that he may deny the fact of resurrection—that, with creation to gaze upon, I see no difficulties anywhere. That accomplished fact laughs at all conceivable impossibilities; and stars in their courses, and flowers in their seasons—the perpetual Lent of winter, and the perpetual Easter of spring—the emerging chrysalis, and the callow brood of fledgelings—the waste and supply of my own frame, my vital air, myself in my manly and conscious life—all these are chartered from heaven as a vast cloud of witnesses, ever testifying unto me that it is not a thing incredible that God should raise the dead.

The completeness of the recompense will be further illustrated if you are reminded that, according to the declaration of the apostle, “*this mortal shall put on immortality.*” It seems necessary for judicial fitness, that the same shall stand in judgment which has been on probation. It is no argument against this, that science has discovered that our bodies are perpetually changing, so that by and by my body will have no particle of that constituent dust which is connected with it now. All this is true; but it is equally true that this change affects not the identity of the individual. He is the same man through all his fluctuations, and you know that he is the same

man, and can trace him through all the stages of his history from veriest infancy to extremest age. Robust in health or wasted by disease, his identity is not injured; so that the same body—think of it, sinner, and tremble!—in which thy guilty deeds were done—The same body—be encouraged, O believer!—which has been the willing agent in thy soul's struggle and worship—shall be doomed and honoured in the recompense of the reward. Brethren, there is no escape from the solemnity of this thought. You and I have life on our hands, and we cannot get rid of it. You and I are living, and we *must* live for ever. You and I are travelling to the recompense of the reward!

3. *It is eternal.*

One essential difference between this world and the next consists in the fact that the relations of the one are changing, but that the relations of the other are final. It would seem that the possibility of alteration or remission in the state, or in the destiny, ends with the Judgment; beyond, all is stern, absolute, everlasting. The Bible has revealed to us only two states of being for the vast and almost endless varieties of human character—the resurrection of life, and the resurrection of condemnation—and the teaching of the Scripture appears to be that the inheritance of both is strictly and literally eternal. I am aware of the awful considerations which this matter involves, and it would ill become me to speak with harshness or with dogmatism upon a subject so solemn; but I am bound to declare what in my prayerful judgment is the meaning of the Book of

God. I carry all your hearts with me, when I tell you of the eternity of the happiness of heaven; that when you read of "everlasting habitations," of "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," of "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," you read of a duration of blessedness which knows no change, nor interval, nor end. Breathe but a whisper of doubt, and you unparadise heaven. Let fall the dark suspicion as a shadow upon my departing spirit, and you rob me of the anchor of my hope. Publish the misgiving in the sky—let the murmur spread through the streets of the city that the happiness is not eternal—and you wither the confessor's palm, and in troubled pause suspend the seraph's song. The measure of heaven can only be eternity. Our reason and our heart demand it. God has promised it. They shall be for ever with the Lord! And what but shuddering feeling will refuse to acknowledge the converse—that as the happiness of the saved, so the misery of the lost is eternal? I cannot argue this matter; I would seal the seal, and clasp the clasp upon it, if I dare. I venture just to give you the three following reasons for my own belief of this appalling truth of God: First, A state of punishment is a state of perpetual *sin*. No repentance can be wrought by purging fire, no salvation by torturing worm. No sin-stained heart can ever, through all eternity, pollute the holiness of heaven. Whence can come the cleansing? The lost have rejected Jesus, and there remaineth no more sacrifice. Secondly, The wicked continuing in the possession of an unsanctified nature, will have no

wish for heaven. Its harmony would be discord, its service drudgery, its companionships an abhorred society. Writhing under the curse, they may long for annihilation, but not for heaven. Thirdly, The duration of the punishment is described in precisely the same word as the duration of the life of the righteous ; and it were to introduce a dangerous canon of biblical interpretation to impugn the one and to admit the other. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

Now, brethren, I have done. I leave the truth to the Holy Spirit, who alone can apply it with power. Changeless, eternal, is "the recompense of the reward."

XXIV.

THE APOSTLE'S CONFLICT.

“ For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh ; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.”—COL. ii. 1, 2.

THE burdens of love are light, and are often unconsciously borne. What a wealth of self-sacrificing tenderness lurks in the heart of a father for a child ; how he delights to prevent the child's desires, and to anticipate his wants ! With what fond apprehension does he live in the child's future, picturing it to himself all through the silent hours, until it becomes almost a reality of his own existence, and he is sensitive already to the coming joy or pain ! There are those amongst you who know that it is possible to live this sort of dual life—a life in which, while personal interests are not forgotten, the man rises into such a purity of unselfish affection as to feel care and “ conflict ” for another.

To you who have this experience there is no need to interpret the apostle's yearning which the first verse of this chapter reveals. It shows us human affection ennobled and sublimed in the person of the

minister of Christ. It is not certainly known that the apostle had ever visited Colosse. It was not, like that at Philippi, a church which he had personally founded. He speaks only of having heard from Epaphras, their pastor, of the steadfastness of their faith and love; but in the solitude of his Roman prison his soul swelled beyond the measure of his chains. In the free vision of the inner eye he swept over all the lands in which the gospel had obtained hold and power; and in that comprehensive "care of all the churches," which came upon him daily, he had great "conflict"—tumultuous tenderness of feeling, a blended burden of anxiety and hope—for those whom he had never seen in the flesh, but who were knit to him in spiritual union because they were partakers of the gospel of Christ. His solicitude trembles into prayer, and he asks for them, in the words of the text, the highest prosperity of the soul. He has passed into the heavens, and has long been in the presence of the Master whom he loved so well; but to those of like spiritual sympathies his hand is still stretched out, and his voice still sounds through the ages. It will profit us to listen and ponder, while we discover from his inspired words what is *the design* and what are *the constituents* of this prosperity of the soul.

The first wish of the apostle embodies the design of the whole, "That their hearts might be comforted"—that is, that by divine preparation and discipline they might be confirmed and strengthened, and so become heirs of satisfaction and of rest. There is a significance in the words which can hardly, out of our own language, be properly understood. There may be pleasure where

mirth is frolicsome and laughter mad ; a thrill of lone delight may sweep through the mind beneath some grandeur of nature, or amid the outside enjoyments of an Italian summer ; there may be a brief and dangerous rapture when, in some wild moment, passion has forgotten thought and duty ; but no heart is " comforted " in scenes like these, either in possession or in memory. The word has a hearty English sound about it. It speaks of settledness and strength. It longs for companionship, and quiet, and calm trust, and ready kindness. It shuts its door upon the world. It hoards its own memories of former trouble, and transmutes them into treasure. It requires, to complete its idea, remembrances of danger and surroundings of peace. It embodies, in fact, all the unutterable meanings which lie hidden in the one word—Home.

If you will think for a moment, you will realize that the leading idea of the word is that of confirmed repose—the quiet after the tempest, a present of warmth and peace after a past of loneliness and sorrow. Would not the waste of waters make the ark the sweeter, when the dove of the deluge furled its weary wing upon the patriarch's sheltering hand ? When the frightened child sobs out its grief, and slumbers—soothed by a nameless tenderness, " as one whom his mother comforteth "—would the rest be what it is but for the shadows which had scared the sleep from the eyelids before ? When the wayfarer is housed for the night, hath not the firelight a ruddier blaze because of the memories of the blinding snow ? How then can the heart be " comforted " in Christ which has not agonized in penitence, grieved over the remembrance of its former

sin, and found a great calm in the assurance of the atonement sufficient and the Saviour willing? The comfort must spring from the faith—the discords must have been reconciled—the prodigal must have been made welcome and brought home. To this agree the various other passages in which the word is used. It is because the warfare of Jerusalem is accomplished, and her iniquity pardoned, that the summons sounds, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.” To convince “of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment,” is the especial work of the “Comforter,” who, in his healing influence, is to abide with the faithful for ever. “Let not your heart be troubled,” though there be dismay and confusion elsewhere, “ye believe in God, believe also in me.” What is the lesson which these and other passages convey? Is it not that when the condemning memory of the past has been silenced by the sure trust in the Mediator’s love, there is peace and blessedness for the soul? Brethren, it is for us to assure ourselves to-day with these glad tidings of great joy. Our God, who is essentially and eternally happy, has intended all his creatures to be happy too. He might have laid upon us penances of costly sacrifice, and duties of unremitting drudgery—a burden to be carried even to the grave—a life wasted in the weariness of a night which knows no morning. But, O the depth of the riches of his mercy! He has made our duty our delight. He has extracted for us from our very rebellions the material for our gratitude and praise, and has made our repose in the covenant which has redeemed us the condition which procures for us the very highest blessedness of our being. It appears,

then, that in God's purpose the end of our religion is our happiness; and that it may be wrought through the processes of knowledge and obedience is the burden of the apostolic prayer.

The verse proceeds to unfold to us the elements through whose harmonious combination this soul comfort is to come. The first and highest necessity is that the heart should be "knit together in love." The word here rendered "knit together," is one which applies to the fitting of the parts of a house in compactness and harmony. Modern architecture delights in the symmetry of a building, whose parts are arranged to be mutually helpful and strengthening without external aid—a building which rises like that of Solomon, without the sound of the axe or the hammer.

To this thought the description of the church would seem to carry us—"From whom the whole body fitly framed together and compacted," not by artificial and alien methods of union, but "by that which every joint supplieth, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love." So the heart is to be "knit together in love"—not united, after many dislocations, by bonds from without, which the weather may fray away, or which the hand of violence may sunder, but compacted from within—weaving the web of its defence, even as the spider which is in kings' palaces, from the texture of its own frame. And that this bond is at once the strongest and surest, you may gather from the manifold excellences which are in the Scripture applied to love. It is the root of the graces, and the ground from which the temple is to rise—"being rooted and grounded in love." It is the end of the commandment and the

fulfilling of the law, that spiritual home from which all the precepts radiate, and to which, as to a centre, they converge. It is the destroyer of all tormenting terror—"Perfect love casteth out fear." It is the blest assurance of life amidst a world of tombs—"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." It is the armour which covers the heart, while the darts of the enemy fly thickly around—"Having on the breastplate of faith and love." It is the vehicle of brotherly service—"By love serve one another." It is the instrument by which all-conquering faith achieves its deeds of heroism—"Faith worketh by love." It is the bracelet which clasps all the other graces—at once a protection and a decoration to the rest—"Put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." It is the essence of the Spirit's work in the heart. As there is a different aroma which identifies the vintage of Eshcol, or Sibmah, or Lebanon, but a common element which makes the fruit a grape in all the vineyards, so joy and peace and gentleness and temperance distinguish the varieties, but "the fruit of the Spirit is love." It is the mark of Divine relationship—"For love is of God." It is the mark of Divine indwelling—"For he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." It is the mark of Divine likeness, for in a climax which cannot be overpassed—"God" himself "is love." With this Scripture testimony to the importance of this grace of love, you cannot wonder at the fervour of the apostolic prayer.

Brethren, the necessity is the same to-day. If our hearts are to be purified from evil, to be conformed to the image of Christ, to receive the strong consolation

of those who are comforted of God, this love must knit them together; this love must be shed abroad, and must abide. Without this, faith were but a cheerless intellectualism, and hope a fugitive emotion; labour would be an intolerable drudgery, and suffering would but exasperate into more defiant rebellion; the law in the members would dash in continual chafing against the law in the mind, and life would be a dreary march towards a desolate but inevitable end.

Brethren, what is it that binds your hearts to-day? Are you kept by the restraints of society? Do the refinements of education preserve you in bounds? Is the good opinion of your fellows a chain to you? In a word, what is your religion? That which rebinds your once alienated spirit to God? Does it act upon you from without, or does it well up as a living principle within? The greensward on the volcano may be covered with flowers, while the fire smoulders at its heart. The prisoner may be loyal because he is gagged and fettered, while his mind is as rebel as ever. But if love keep the heart, the life will illustrate its kindness, and the countenance be lit up with its glory; duty will become delight, and suffering a crown of triumph; faith will rejoice in a satisfaction which no doubts disturb; and hope, piercing the invisible, will pass within the jasper walls, and abide in the presence of the throne. Oh, ask yourselves to-day, if your hearts are "knit together by love!" Tell me not of your high attainments, nor of your hourly joys—speak not of your understanding all mysteries and all knowledge. You may have an imperial fancy and a creative genius, a life austere moral, and a face preternaturally sad;

all the graces may encompass you as a girdle: but if there be not love in the heart, the clasp of the girdle is wanting; the one thing lacking will endanger the loss of the whole, and that one thing is in itself of such priceless value that without it you will forfeit heaven. Who does not pray—

“ O shed it in my heart abroad,
Fulness of love, of heaven, of God ” ?

The apostle proceeds to mention, in the second place, as an element of soul prosperity, the possession of an assured faith—“ And unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding.” The importance of an intelligent perception of gospel truth and a decisive grasp of its great principles in the inner man, is urged upon us by the exhortations of the word, and enforced upon us by the experience of our own witnessing hearts.

You have not forgotten how often the apostle entreats that believers should be “ rooted ” in faith, “ grounded ” in faith, “ ’stablished ” in faith, that they should strive after “ full assurance of faith,” that they should “ hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering.” You have seen sometimes how the mad wind has sported with the billows of the ocean, dashing them against the rocks in his fury, until they have foamed out their shame in spray; and perhaps, as you saw that frail, helpless thing, you remembered that it was written, “ He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” You remember the Lord’s prayer for Peter, in the stern sifting time of Satan, how it went to the source of human strength,

and assured the patience, and the meekness, and the courage, and all the other graces, if only the faith stood firm: "Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy *faith* might not fail." Now from these passages, which are but few from a multitude, you may gather God's estimate of the importance of a settled faith for man. And do not our hearts testify to the same truth? Is there not comfort in trust, and anxiety in suspicion and misgiving? Is not the land of doubt a dreary region to dwell in? Would you choose the dim cresset in the crypt, while the glad sun climbeth up the sky? Is there any guarantee for the holy practice in the wavering faith? Can the life be right without a standard of appeal, which shall rebuke the wild impulses of passion, and restrain the latent lawlessness of the carnal mind, while it kindles the cold-hearted into heroism, applauds the timid venture to do right, and emboldens the confessor to bear witness amidst a scoffing world? Brethren, I can crave no better gift, whether for myself or you, than that we have "the riches of the full assurance of understanding" upon things divine. Mark the wealthy repetition of the apostle's words. The wise man in the olden dispensation enlarges upon the worth of understanding. It is more precious than rubies. It is a costly, priceless treasure. But the apostle is not satisfied that God's people should be dowered with this. They must have the "assurance of understanding"—knowledge deepening into conviction—"the full assurance"—not a doubt suffered to linger, not the shadow of a suspicion to disturb; the truth so thoroughly apprehended that

the principle has become like another faculty, part of the man, enfibred in his very nature; a possession of his; his "riches," of which neither panic nor robber can deprive him—riches which wax not old, a treasure which faileth not through the lapse of waning years: "unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding."

The tendency of the present age is to leave behind it all the old beliefs, and to press restlessly after some imagined beyond of truth and beauty, which no one has ever yet tracked, much less discovered. There are those who do not scruple to adopt one of the brilliant fallacies of the German philosopher, that they would rather have the desire for truth than its possession; and in certain circles it is considered a proof of manliness to have outgrown the faith of our childhood, which yet was the faith upon which the sturdy manhood of our brave fathers grew. But it were a weary world, surely, if there is nothing settled. Life is of the shortest, think you not, to be spent in dreams. Men die while we battle out our great world problems; and, if the old faith be true—and in no field has it been worsted yet—they go somewhere and are living yet; and while we were arguing, we might have brought them to Jesus. We are dying ourselves. The place which now knows us will soon know us no more. Can it be, that we are to be satisfied with a possible future—that no light fringes the cloud of the sepulchre—that we are to subside into the cheerless conviction that life is a balance of chances, and death a leap in the dark; and all this, when the light awaits our summons, when at any moment we may be flooded

with a glory richer than golden, when Christ, our Surety and our Saviour, sits upon his throne? Brethren, there is certainty in truth. There may be much in all our systems which will not remain. Error and impermanence are inseparable from all human teaching. The test of time, the test of more accurate inquiry, the crucial test of the last assize, may sweep away some of the frivolous inscriptions which human vanity or craft has carved; but the inner truth—the words so lofty that none but the Divine could utter them, and yet so simple and saving that he who runs may read them and live—abides, graven upon the rock for ever. Do I speak to any to-day upon whom doubt has darkened? Is there one before me who imagines that freedom from restraint is freedom from misgiving; and who is trooping on to the future, not in the settledness of a faith which does not question, but in the stoical indifference which does not care to inquire? Oh for words inspired to rouse you to a sense of danger! My brethren! it is tremendously possible, to say the least of it, that this Bible may be true. If it be true, it is overwhelmingly true, for its truth affects interests which can never die—interests that are not alien, but our own; interests which may be affected at any moment for eternity, because of the precarious tenure on which we hold our lives. Put away from you, for your soul's sake, the incipient infidelity in which you are beginning to indulge. In doubt there is discomfort and danger, and death is not far behind. To all who are sincere and candid, Christianity offers her evidences, her counsels, her promises, even the "riches

of the full assurance of understanding." Press forward until you realize. You *shall* know, "if you follow on to know the Lord;" and while others wander hopelessly, with sturdy heart and axe in hand, to cleave a new way for themselves through the yet untrodden forest, where the sun shines not, and where the serpents brood—for you there shall be "an highway and a way," in which your sainted sires have trodden. "It shall be called the way of holiness;" in it "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

The apostle implies further that this faith is not to be hoarded in the heart, a miser's treasure of whose existence he will not tell, but is to be made effectual in the service of Christian witness—bearing "unto the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." While the working of Christianity is secret, the results are palpable. The Spirit, enshrined in the hidden man of the heart, gives a gladder sparkle to the countenance, and a changed inspiration to the life. They are branded with the stigma of lasting disgrace, of whom it is said—"Because of the Pharisees they did not confess him; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." The duty of confession is lifted in one passage into equality with the duty of faith—"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." The faith, moreover, which is so carefully concealed that only

those who go into the Shekinah of the heart have suspicion of its existence, is in danger of dying from the very closeness of the air it breathes; the faith which is acknowledged is braced by the effort of confession, and lives and grows amid the free fellowships of men. Those, then, who are strong in the assurance of belief are to be brave in the boldness of acknowledgment, as well for their own comfort, as that the testimony may be as the sound of many waters, and that the cloud of witnesses may become denser day by day. This faith, further, is to be the bravest just where other men fail. There are some who confuse strangely what they call faith with sight. They believe when they discover, or when they understand. They must thrust the finger into the print of the nails, and hear the kindly voice, long silent, speaking with human tongue. But the Saviour's blessing is upon those that have not seen and yet have believed. The grandest triumph of faith is in the acknowledgment of a mystery, when proud reason bows, and rebel will submits, and the awed senses fear to enter into the cloud. Do you see a man down in the dust there, upon whom the storm has pelted, alone in the midnight, bereft of sympathy and almost of hope, from whom the passers-by shrink with a sort of fear, so great is the smart of his trouble; and yet, among his heart's ruins, and with all his idols shattered, wailing through the darkness, "I believe"? I tell you, monarchs may doff their crowns in the presence of such an one, for earth hath no higher sublimity than this. My brethren, the world wants your faith, and the testimony of your faith. Do not

your Saviour the dishonour to deny him, either by the lie of speech or by the lie of silence. Be ready to bear witness for him both in the lip and in the life. It is in your power to become of the number of the world's greatest heroes. Those are they who are

“Bold to take up, firm to sustain the consecrated cross.”

You will not fail to observe how the leading idea of the text is carried out, how harmoniously all these things work for the “comfort” and strength of the believer. What soul is at once so strong and so happy as that of which love is the central emotion, faith the directing principle, and witness-bearing the daily experience? Comfort in the soul whose passions have been put to rest, and whose far-reaching benevolence would fain impress the world with the deep repose which it has won from its almighty Redeemer—comfort in the mind which has fenced itself round from danger in the tried word, and is thenceforth hidden as in a divine pavilion from the strife of tongues—comfort in the brave life, which has trampled down the cowardly and the shameful, and dares to testify for Christ without ostentation and without fear. Surely the world's lost secret of happiness is revealed. That after which sages have panted, and whose ideal bliss the minstrels of all ages have sung, that which is the light of every nation, that which is the yearning of every heart, may become your possession and mine when our hearts are “comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the

acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." Yet further—for the riches of the promise are not exhausted yet—there is additional material for comfort in the matter of the mystery which is thus embraced, believed, witnessed. "Of God, and of the Father, and of Christ."

I am by no means disposed to insist upon the actual phraseology of a passage in which there are confessedly various readings, and yet I think I do no violence to the words by believing that they are cumulative in their meaning, that each limb of the sentence has a distinct and increasingly deep significance of its own. Take the first thought—"The mystery of God." "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" His existence is a mystery. We are bewildered as we think of him. His power, so enormous; his survey, so comprehensive; his goodness, so ineffable; his Being, which fills Eternity. Beyond our senses, beyond our sight, and yet leaving his impress everywhere. Creation his magnificent herald; "whom no man hath seen or can see," but consciously present in the spirits of his people; our own hearts his witnesses in every thrill of feeling, and in every wave of life. What a mystery to every thoughtful mind is enfolded in the thought of God! And yet what comfort in the mystery! How sad to sit down in a hot mad world like ours, without the thought of a ruler! How cold to believe in Chance as our Maker, or in inflexible Law as our Governor! Things, not persons; things relentless, unheeding, blind! How unsatisfying to think of an army of

rival deities, each striving for the mastery—gods of the hills battling against gods of the plain—and the worshippers waiting the issue, drunk with delirious hope, or shivering in a paralysis of fear! How dreary to conceive of a Supreme, selfish and lustful as the gods of the heathen, or remote and unpitying to the creation which he has flung from his hand! There is no comfort in conceptions like these. They blanch the cheek, they curdle the blood. They exasperate the nature either to defiance or despair. While the atheist therefore would deny a God, and the sceptic ignore his providence, and the heathen are bewildered in a multitude of deities, and sacrifice to gods which smite them, the Christian will exult that all round about him there is God—active, conscious, living, personal God—who rules all things, and restrains all things, and makes all things work together for good, and will bring all things to one peaceful issue at the last; and wrapping himself in this “mystery of God” as in a garment, will be glad and free in his testimony: “O Lord, thou art, and thou art the rewarder of them that diligently seek thee.”

The second word goes further, introduces into the mystery of Godhead another and tenderer mystery—even the mystery of Fatherhood. This is, surely, more wonderful still. That he who is omnipotent, who has finished every might and marvel of creation—so glorious that seraphs droop and hide from his brightness—so wise that he chargeth his angels with folly—that he should sustain this relation to his creatures; and in a yet closer sense to those who have believed in his Son, entering into all the solici-

tude and pity of the human father, only with infinite instead of human tenderness—caring for the fortunes of his children, bearing with their frailties, forming their characters, loving in his chastisement, but ever readier to commend than to chide; and all this over so large a family that they are more than can be numbered. Oh, the mystery—the inexplicable and condescending mystery! And yet the comfort of the thought.

To travel through life, not under a despot's tyranny, but under a Father's smile. To feel the inspiration of a Father's command making the duty pleasant, and the clasp of a Father's hand sustaining through the bitterness of trouble; to walk through the world as through a home, where the walls have the Father's picture, and every room and stair his memorial, and at last to lie down calmly on the death-couch, and, after a brief sleep, wake up in the Father's arms. What can compare with this? Where is the heart which does not thrill with a new rapture as this thought is realized? All the dreams of the former time are fulfilled and exceeded; every murmur is hushed; the orphans have a refuge, the curse is reversed, the universe at rest, in this grand, evangelical Fatherhood of God!

The third thought introduces into this dual mystery another, which brings them both down to man—the mystery of Atonement. Every step deepens our wonder. Of all marvels, this is the most marvellous. The grace which stoops to solicit the rebels whom the power might have crushed—the patience which bore the last insult against the Monarch's honour,

and avenged it only by bidding the traitors live—the solemn expedient by which were secured the vindicated law and the voluntary offering—the provision which made angels stand and gaze, and suspended, as in troubled pause, the seraph's song—God's own Son bending, for human sake and sin, beneath a weight of agony which none but Almightyness could inflict, and which none but Almightyness could bear! Is there not enough in the thought to bow us as in the very dust, while, under our breath and in extremest awe, we acknowledge—"Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory"—than all other mysteries greater and more mysterious far? But vast as is the mystery, still vaster is the comfort, for those who read the mystery aright. Heaven and Earth reconciled—God and man friends—despair banished from the world, with not a rood of its territory which he can call his own—cleansing for the most leprous—peace for the most disquieted—life welling up from every sepulchre—salvation for the most abandoned and hopeless—heaven for a race of the ransomed, with no bar to prevent the entrance of any, other than their own unbelief has piled. This is the gospel of the mystery of Christ to man—*Government, Fatherhood, Atonement*. "The mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." We acknowledge this mystery to-day. The Lord reigns—the Father smiles—the Saviour died, and lives to die no more. "The mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." Beloved, comfort yourselves

in the acknowledgment of this mystery. See to it that through Christ your Saviour you cry, "Abba, Father," and render your life's allegiance to the King. "The mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." In this we rest, content to pass our lives in the attempt to unbraid it, and revelling in each new discovery in a fulness of delight and wonder. "The mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." In this confidence we may well pass calmly down the vale in which the shadows gather, assured that beneath the glory of this mystery, the dark mystery of death is harmless as the journey of a child. "The mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." Into this the angels still desire to look, awaiting our coming that they may be students of it in our company, until the end cometh, and the Father and the Son are one, and the mystery of God is finished, and God is all in all.

XXV.

“THE LIVELY HOPE.”

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.”—1 PET. i. 3, 4.

WE hardly needed to have announced the Epistle out of which these words are taken—the words themselves reveal the man of whom they are the characteristic expression. As in the time of his cowardice, so in the time of his loyal and self-denying labour for Christ, the “speech” of Peter “bewrayeth” him. There is a warmth in his full heart, and a freshness in his rapid utterance, which become contagious in hearts which are partakers of “like precious faith;” and it is difficult to read his ascriptions of gratitude, and refrain the while from our own. He has sat down to address words of comfort and counsel to the banished ones, who had been driven by persecution from their homes, but who preserved in their exile their stedfastness and faith; and immediately after the salutation he breaks out in tones which stir the heart like a clarion, in the words of the text. How could they faint or be discouraged with such a hope to hearten them? How could they but keep

the precepts with all diligence, lest they should embarrass the certainty of their inheritance, and forfeit the claim which the "lively hope" prefigured? What a well-spring of comfort would be opened up within them by the remembrance that—hunted as they were, outcasts from the friend's presence, and from the temple's privilege—they had yet a dowry and a home! Brethren, in the pilgrim path which we are all called to travel, we become "acquainted with grief," as did our Master; there are long hours of loneliness and struggle—hours of "the power of darkness"—where to the eye of sense there is but an utter cloud, and where even the eye of faith can scarcely pierce the shadows. It behoves us, that in these sad Lenten days of life, we should see an Easter beyond them, or we were "of all men most miserable." For us, therefore, it is a brightening thought that we have a "lively hope;" and if it be but assured and warrantable, we may console ourselves in the darkest of our experience by the remembrance of this hope of our calling. And of this hope, let us ask ourselves—

I. *Whence doth it spring?*

II. *How is it certified?*

III. *Unto what is it tending?*

I. Hope is popularly defined to be the expectation of future good; but to render the definition complete, the good should be an object which the mind affects and which the heart desires. It has been implanted in the breast of universal man, and is one of the chiefest displays of the loving-kindness of the Lord. Without it the world were a sepulchre, and the conscience a

hell. There is hardly a condition of human adversity which it cannot soothe and sweeten. It has strung the courage of the warrior to achieve his deeds of daring; the mariner has felt its inspiration when the spirit of the hurricane sat upon the rattling shrouds; it has aroused from their sullen lethargy the trader of ruined fortunes, and the man upon whose shattered heart has fallen the pitiless hail of sorrow; it has kindled in the eye of the banished one, strained eagerly across the waters where rose the hill which hung over his home; the poor captive, at the base of whose prison the wild waters have dashed in chainless play has yielded to its spell in slumber, and at least has dreamed of freedom; and, piercing down to the most hapless lot of man, it has beat feebly in the heart of the slave, and redeemed him from uttermost despair. Surely there was truth in the conception of old classic times—in the fable of Pandora's box, which, filled with all evils by the displeasure of the gods, had yet a preponderance of blessings, because hope lurked at the bottom.

But the hope to which the text refers is not an instinct. It is a gift, and is not, therefore, the common heritage of all mankind. It is a hope of heaven, of which the world knoweth not, and to which the sinner is, of necessity, a stranger. Men tell you, indeed, that they have a hope of heaven; but, resolved into its elements, it is only a vague anticipation of future blessedness, resting upon no sure foundation, and working no beneficent results. Those who have not believed in Jesus are excluded from this hope, both by their prevalent unbelief and by the declared word

of God: "The hope of the unjust man perisheth." "The hope of the wicked shall be as the giving up of the ghost." They are "without God in the world," and consequently without hope. In contrast to this delusive expectation, which can only ruin those who cherish it, the apostle refers to the "lively hope" of the Christian, into which, by Divine power, he has been "begotten again." That to which he had no native claim has been wrought in his soul by the free grace of God. It is a "lively hope;" that is, it is *living*; not a cruel mockery, nor a distempered dream, but a warranted assurance, resting upon sanctions which are Divinely authenticated, and upon a Word which cannot lie. It is a "lively hope;" that is, it is *active*, a mighty energy, influential to the very depths of the being. The hope which the worldling professes leaves his heart untouched, stimulates him to no spiritual action, does not prompt him to the faintest measure of preparation for the heaven into which he hopes to be received; but "every man that hath *this* hope in him purifieth himself, even as God is pure." It prompts the man to qualify himself for the possession of his inheritance. It makes him feel that the heir to royal honours should have a royal soul; and that though sweet were the minstrelsy, and glorious the companionship of heaven, there would be discord and solitude to the heart that was defiled by sin; so while it joys in the prospect, it fails not in its endeavour to work the meetness within. It is a "lively hope;" that is, it maketh not ashamed—the man does not blush to confess it in the gate—he can talk of it among the princes of his people. It gives him courage

amid the lowering clouds, or in the day of battle; through the dark night-watches it teaches him the patience which anticipates the morning; and it fills him with a joy unspeakable, which makes all the present radiant, and which lights up the yet untrodden future with an ever crescent glory. Yes, it maketh not ashamed. With it in his bosom, the man can stand up amid his heart's ruins, erect and undismayed; he can lie down calmly on the death-couch, defiant of the gaunt shadow that presses up the stair; he can exult in seraph-friends, ere yet the emaciate frame has ceased its mortal breathing; he can breast the furious wave of the dark river—a brave swimmer in the swelling of Jordan—and there, at the heaven-gate, the good hope will die; happy, like a proud mother in her pangs, that from its dying an everlasting fruition will be born.

It is manifest that such a hope can only be of divine bestowment; it is at once too lofty and too lasting to come from meaner hands. And it is the gift of God to those who receive the Gospel of his Son. Faith in Christ produces it, and in proportion to the intensity of the faith does the hope increase and brighten. We must never forget that, like every other spiritual blessing, it is "not of debt, but of grace." It is not of our prescriptive or unforfeited right, but "according to his abundant mercy." None of those who have realized the hope will deny that its source is thus Divine. Their conceptions of vileness are too deep. They are too enlightened upon the magnitude of their sin and of their deliverance, to hesitate upon the matter for a moment. The brow

of the sceptic may darken, and the pride of the carnal may rebel; but if you interrogate the godly, you will find that his will is submissive, and his heart is full. The penitent, who has but recently believed, who yet shudders as if he felt the sliding earth and nearing flame—“a blasphemer, a persecutor, injurious”—tells you, amid grateful tears, “But I obtained mercy.” The white-haired saint, as, just ready to depart, he surveys from the Nebo-summit the whole path of his difficult climbing, gasps out his latest testimony, “By the grace of God, I am what I am.” Nay, the blessed ones, whose long experience of the golden streets has made them at home in heaven, fling down upon us without ceasing the melody of the same eternal song:—

“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.”

“’Tis mercy all ! let earth adore ;
Let angel minds inquire no more.”

II. What is the medium by which this hope is certified to us ? The apostle says that it is “by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead ;” and this calls us to the contemplation of the glorious triumph by which our Saviour has abolished death, and has been “declared to be the Son of God, with power.” There is no part of the history of Jesus, which is either unimportant in itself or uninteresting to those whom he shed his heart’s blood to redeem. Matters which are seemingly trivial have couched in them a grave significance, and bear directly and impressively upon the great purpose for which he came into the world. And yet—save that death which is the foundation of

our hopes of life—there is no spot more hallowed to the affections of the believer, more sacred to his pilgrim feet, than the garden in which there was a sepulchre—where, amid the flowers of the opening spring, the body of Jesus was laid. Oh ! surely the heart will kindle, as we visit it, with thoughts of triumph, not of terror, for it speaks to us of a destroyed destroyer—of a mighty despotism shattered for ever—of a deliverer, whose victory were not complete unless a rejoicing people share it.

“ Yes, even the lifeless stone is dear,
For thoughts of him who late lay here ;
And the base world, since Christ hath died,
Ennobled is and glorified.
No more a charnel-house to fence
The relics of lost innocence ;
A vault of ruin and decay,
The imprisoning stone is rolled away.
’Tis now a fane, where Love can find
Christ everywhere embalmed and shrined ;
Aye gathering up memorials sweet,
Where’er she sets her duteous feet.
’Tis now a cell where angels use
To come and go with heavenly news,
And in the ears of mourners say :
‘ Come, see the place where Jesus lay.’ ”

The resurrection of Jesus is fitly put here for his whole atoning work, as it is at once the proof of the reality and completeness of his death as a sacrifice, and the token of its acceptance as a satisfaction by the justice of the Father. Take the first thought.

Without the death of Christ there could be no “lively hope” for man. However spotless the character, and however beneficent the miracles, though the life was a perfect obedience, and the ministry a

transforming power—we are reconciled by none of these. It is the shedding of blood which has purchased the remission of sin. It is the *death* of Christ by which we live. Anything, therefore, which has a tendency to assure us of the reality of that death, cannot but be grateful to us, for our mistrusts sometimes master us, and the sun of our hope is apt to go down in storm and shadow. Now that Christ died there is small controversy. I say small controversy—because there have been insignificant insinuations that he was but in a swoon at the time of the removal from the cross, and that, recovered by the loving care of his disciples, he perpetuated the great imposture which has commanded the belief of the world. It needs not to waste time in an answer to such an allegation, which, you perceive, impugns the spotlessness of that life, whose pure morality kindled even the selfish heart of Rousseau into an admiration of enthusiasm.

God has taken care to fence round the death of Christ with evidences which no sceptic can gainsay. The cross was reared in the very midst of the ages—when men with sharpened intellects had begun to weigh evidence, and to guard against fraud—when the schools had fostered an inquisitive spirit, and when there was a general avarice for knowledge. There was history when Christ was crucified, and that history records the fact from the pens of writers who were unfriendly to Messiah's claims. Even men's evil passions were made to subserve the purposes of Divine attestation. The imperious Roman and the jealous and cruel Jew were equally interested in the frustra-

tion of imposture, and they join with swarth Cyrenian and cultured Greek in witness of the death of Jesus. The soldier who pierced him bears testimony as important as if Providence, and not malignity, had poised his spear—and the sepulchre hewn out of the rock, with its quiet clay and rich embalmments, with its imperial signet and its pomp of guards, authenticates—so that all the world may receive it that Christ did actually die. The resurrection rests upon evidence equally, and if possible more, convincing. Sophistry itself might well be silenced before the vast accumulation of testimony which crowds around the forsaken tomb. It is right, therefore, that we should comfort ourselves as we stand by the grave of Jesus—a grave now emptied of its tenant—with the expectation of the blessings which his death was undertaken to procure.

During the time of his incarnate life, his announcement of his coming fate, and of the purpose of expiation which it involved, fell often upon the ears of his disciples like a startling rain; and, on several occasions, he taught them to anticipate his resurrection as the completion of his work, and that which was to vindicate his character, and approve him to have come down from heaven. And we too, upon whom there has come fuller light from the descent of the Spirit, and from the fulfilments of the interpreting years—we too may rejoice in this Easter-tide, even with exceeding joy. Jesus is risen!—then there has come a reversal upon the olden curse, and this noble nature of mine shall not cease in the tomb from an existence, whose rapture and whose resources it will

but just have begun to feel. Jesus is risen!—then that terrible shadow which has clouded life, and kept the soul in bondage, is not invincible as I feared; for he, who has conquered death and spoiled his goods, is my surety and my friend. Jesus is risen!—then the fear which has crept about my heart, like the mortal faintness about the life-springs of the dying, need be my master no longer. Jesus is risen! and out of his tomb—into whose gloomy guardianship I cast my old despairs—there rise for me acceptance and comfort and blessing, as the young lightnings are born out of the blackness of the cloud; and subdued and humbled beneath the unmerited mercy, I walk freely on, "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead." But the resurrection of Jesus is also the sweet token of the acceptance of his offerings on high. It was necessary, in order to assure the hearts of those who might believe on his name, that the prevalence of the Saviour's sacrifice should be publicly declared. *He* knew that it was accepted when in the agonies of the cross he spoke those meaning words, "It is finished," so close was the harmony of counsel between the Son and the Father. But how was it to be manifested to the world—to the heedful multitudes who awaited in wondering suspense the issue—to the few true-hearted who had ventured on him a faith which was the common wonder and the common scorn—to the disciples who laid down their hopes in obsequy, in the same sepulchre which held their Master's body—to the future ages, whose trust it was to secure, and whose hopes it was to enkindle for

heaven? To these the only attestation could be by the resurrection from the dead. Without this there would have been absolute uncertainty—unending conflict of faith with feeling, a blank earth, and a frowning heaven; and even the most loyal of the adherents of the Nazarene might be excused if he spoke of the trust regretfully as a dear relic of the past, upon which the hateful tomb had closed: "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." But the great triumph of the resurrection chased all doubts away, and the three days' suspense for the fortunes of the world was broken by an achievement of wondrous victory, which exceeded the loftiest thought and fondest dream of men. Hence the apostle, in the exulting consciousness of privilege, asks, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea *rather*, that is risen again."

The argument in the fifteenth chapter of Corinthians goes even further. In that magnificent burst of mingled logic and eloquence, which has been selected by the Church as the requiem, in whose words Christians express—in their last, fond lingering by their dead—at once their triumph and their sorrow, the apostle says, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain, ye are yet in your sins." It would seem from this that we are shut up to the resurrection of Christ as a necessary preliminary to our salvation. And so it is: if death had triumphed over our Champion, our doom must have been sealed for ever. Dark indeed would have been the destiny of a world of sinners, if the Second Adam had lain powerless in the sepulchre which had entombed the first. "But

now is Christ risen from the dead." The chains of the olden bondage snapped when it was sought to bind them upon Jehovah's fellow—just as the withs, which would have fettered common men, were as gossamer when Samson woke and tried them. "Now is Christ risen," and therefore there is hope for the sinner. Our preaching is not vain; there is a power in it which stirs the souls of the listeners. Sometimes gentle as the snowfall, and sometimes resistless as the cataract, its influence descends; but it is the influence of Jesus and the resurrection. Your faith is not vain; it rests upon sure promises and compasses mighty ends. Bravely does it upbear amid surrounding evil. Keenly does it pierce the invisible, as a land with which it dares to be familiar; but it is faith in a risen and exalted Saviour. Ye are not in your sins—those of you who believe in Jesus—for the victory of his cross, declared by the marvel of his rising, has purged your every stain. Nay, they also that have fallen asleep in Christ are not perished, as the scoffers slanderously affirm; the first-fruits have been waved before the Lord, and the whole harvest of the immortal shall follow—"they that are Christ's, at his coming." The whole ransomed universe, present at the death of Death, shall swell the triumph of him who hath abolished him, and creation in all its circlets shall echo to the one song, bursting from hearts which are glad in the fruitions of redemption—"Begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

III. We can but briefly glance at the recompense in which this hope of the Christian is fulfilled—"to

an inheritance." The word at once traces the blessing to its source, and humbles, at the outset, all the vapourings of human pride. An inheritance is neither reward of industry nor meed of valour. In its common acceptation it comes upon those who inherit at the moment of their birth, ere yet they have awaked to personal consciousness of being; and there have been cases in which the wealthy or royal sire has died before his heir was born, and broad lands have had a baby for their owner, and imperial dignity has sat idly on the infant of an hour. It is by a like title that believers enter heaven. They cannot purchase it. They may not win its honours, as a knight his spurs, by bravery. They are heirs because of their sonship, and their sonship is by adoption and grace. Boasting is excluded, and gratitude inspired by this boundless love of God.

Of this inheritance we are told that it is "*incorruptible*." It does not contain the seeds of dissolution. There is nothing about it which tends to its own decay. This is the first point of contrast between earth and heaven. Here all things are fleeting. Enjoyment, even of the keenest, wears itself out by its own continuity. Wealth brings a curse to those who hoard it. Renown pines in the lofty loneliness to which it has climbed. Pleasure palls upon the sense, even of her maddest slaves; the vile body itself, the vehicle of all enjoyment, falls away to corruption and the worm. But everything in heaven is of a nature that is fitted to survive. It is of the essence of celestial joy that it is changeless. "This corruptible shall put on incorruption," that it may be

fit to enter upon it; there is no mixture, as here, of elements which chasten its raptures; there are no disturbing forces nor warring legions, nor crafty or vigilant foes.

It is *undefiled*. Herein the reason of its incorruptibility is found. It is earth's defilement which induces earth's putrescence. It may be, as some affirm, that there is no provision in the human anatomy for eternal existence; but death, in a sinless world, would have been but a chrysalis sleep—to be reproduced in a brighter and more glorious being. Death, a curse and a penalty, came only by sin. Banish sin from the world, and from the heart, and you have burnt out the seeds of the plague. But in heaven there is no sin; and where there is nothing which defileth there can be nothing which decays. Listen to this, ye Christian warriors, struggling manfully against the evil of your own hearts, and longing for the time when you shall have full deliverance from its power. Yonder, in heaven—that heaven of which you have the lively hope in Christ—your highest ambition shall be realized. There shall be a world without a tempter, and a soul without a stain. The long night-watch of the soul shall be over. The morning cometh, and it broadens and brightens into a noon, whose sun shall never go down.

This inheritance "*fadeth not away*." There comes upon it rare enjoyment—no whisper of a change. Here we walk amid the tombs of our pleasures. We remember them: how hot our pursuit—how fierce the brief delight—how speedy the unmasking of their hollowness. We thought the world an Eden, and each

terrace and alcove a scene, God-ordered, and sparkling with his very light and beauty; but how we were deceived! We find it but a cemetery—grassy turf on graves, with urns full of ashes—here and there a broken column and cenotaph, that does not even tell us where the body of the departed lies. "Vanity of vanities"—so we scorn it. "Creatures made subject to vanity"—so bitterly we speak of ourselves. But yonder there will be neither consuming memories, nor boding fears. Once pass the portals of the inheritance, and you are safe for ever. It would be unparadised by thought of change or end. Its still waters always flow; its flowers always bloom. Its rest remaineth. Its knowledge grows; its purity shines; its friendships embrace for ever. Its God lives, an everlasting light; and in his presence is fulness of joy and pleasure for evermore—

"Reserved in heaven."

How should the possession of the lively hope upbear the soul of the believer beneath present experience of trial! The inheritance is not now in possession. It is reserved in heaven. The Christian is not exempted from present visitations of sorrow. He becomes "acquainted with grief," as was his Master. It is necessary for his discipline, for his growth of soul, for the evolution of his perfect character, that it should be so; not as an arbitrary allotment, but as an arrangement, benign and effectual. It is "through much tribulation" that we enter the kingdom. In the haste and eagerness of spiritual youth, this necessity comes upon us as a new disappointment; but experience

chastens our impetuosity, and we feel that when we have companied with stranger trials, we have, like Abraham, been entertaining angels unawares. Oh ! there is many a grateful spirit which has learned to sing—

“ ‘ I thought that the course of the pilgrim to heaven
Would be bright as the summer and glad as the morn ; ’
God showed me the path, it was dark and uneven,
All rugged with rock and all tangled with thorn.
I dreamed of celestial reward and renown ;
I asked for the triumph which blesses the brave ;
I asked for the palm-branch, the robe, and the crown ;
I asked, and thou showedst me a cross and a grave.
Subdued and instructed, at length, to thy will,
My hopes and my longings I fain would resign.
Oh, give me the heart that can wait and be still,
Nor know of a wish or a pleasure but thine.”

The lively hope ! How it should comfort the mourners, even in the time of their intensest sorrow ! It is no sin to weep for the loss of friends. Rather it were sin not to weep, when God himself has scooped out the channel for our tears. Religion does not erect herself upon the ruins of nature. She looks upon a Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted in Ramah, and she has no word of rebuke for the mourning mother. She bids you listen to a bereaved father, sitting in all the majestic loneliness of sorrow : “ Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son ! ” And then she takes you to the tomb of Lazarus, and, in the touching poetry in which St. John has painted that interesting scene, she tells you that “ Jesus wept.” But the Christian must not be conformed to the world even in his grief. He must not sorrow as those that have no hope. We

have not looked our last upon our friends. We shall see them again, not as we last saw them upon earth—emaciate, feeble, plague-stricken, infirm—but in a beauty that is stainless and unfading, and in a youth which defies the years. I have known a case in which a mother mourned her son—a profligate, a criminal—and yet the hope sustained her, gave sublimity to her faith and intensity to her prayers, and encouraged her through humiliation, disgrace, degeneracy, and public shame, to grasp the promise and to hold on to the undying word. If in circumstances of such sharp contrast to those of the mourners of to-day the religion failed not of its comfort, what are your sources of consolation—yours, who mourn a son of fragrant reputation, “who wore the white flower of a blameless life,” who was affectionate to you and dutiful to God; in whom the love of Christ burned, and the zeal of holy labour dwelt like a consuming fire; who never made an enemy, and never lost a friend; who left the witness that he rejoiced in dying, and has now, through the merit of the Redeemer, passed through death triumphant home? Therefore, dear friends, comfort one another in this your hour of trial with these words.

XXVI.

GOD'S PRESENCE IN GOD'S REST.

“Arise, O Lord, into thy rest ; thou, and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness ; and let thy saints shout for joy.”—Ps. cxxxii. 8, 9.

IN the psalm before us this prayer stands in a kind of central position—central to the need which prompted it on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to the bountiful answer which it received. We shall most profitably study it in this connection, and shall be most likely to extract its wealth, that we may coin it into currency for the pressing needs of to-day.

Opinions are divided as to the authorship of the psalm, and as to the time at which it was composed. From its place in the book we may judge that the compilers ranked it among those nameless pilgrim-songs, some of which were wailed forth by the rivers of Babylon, and some of which celebrated the return from exile.

Others, however, students of these beautiful mysteries regard it as the composition of David, or, with more reason, of Solomon ; and assert that it was composed, either on the occasion of the removal of the ark, or of the completion of the temple. That, whenever written, there is in it a reference to that glorious offering unto

God, is evident from the close coincidence between the prayer in the text, and the words of Solomon before he "made an end of praying." You remember that scene with its bowed worshippers, and suspended service, and down-darting flame, and the overspreading glory of the Lord—one of the most marvellous displays of divine power and grace which the Scriptures record. It was the swift answer to their invocation, "Now therefore arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength; let thy priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness" (2 Chron. vi. 41).

We do not err, therefore, in believing that the psalm has a special appropriateness to such occasions as that which has gathered us to-day.

I confess I like to think of Solomon as the writer of the psalm; partly because I long to find anything redeeming in the character of that prince, both in wisdom and in folly; and partly because of the beautiful self-forgetfulness of the opening cry unto God, "Lord, remember David and all his afflictions." It was seemly; it was filially reverent for Solomon thus to pray. And it was right. It was only tracing back the river to its source. The temple was Solomon's handiwork, but it was David's thought—wrought out, elaborated, crystallized into marble, and stone, and gold. Honour to the brain which conceives, rather than to the hand which but executes the conception by plan and plummet and rule. Where were the victor's palm, if the subtle thought of the commander were not marshalled on the tented field? If the sower cease from his painful steps and lonely toil, there

would be a silence upon the song of the reaper, and upon the joy of the harvest. There was a fitness, therefore, as well as a gracefulness, in the remembrance of the planner from the lips of the builder; and that amid the rest of the completed work, and when the temple rose up solemn and stately before the grateful eyes of Solomon, the first utterance of his gratitude and prayer should be, "Lord, remember David." The "afflictions" of which the first verse speaks might better be rendered "solicitudes," and have exclusive reference to his almost life-long anxieties about the ark and the house of the Lord. The history of the ark would be familiar to him from earliest childhood. It would be the song of the minstrel, and the story of the elder, and the theme of endless converse as the peasants did their shepherding on the plains. There were ancients in Bethlehem in the time of David's youth, who remembered the disastrous field of Aphek when it fell into the hands of the Philistines; and whose hearts would swell with triumph, as they recounted how Ashdod, and Gath, and Ekron, hasted successively to rid themselves of their mysterious captive; how basely Dagon fell in its presence; how the imprisoned symbol spoiled the oppressors' gods; and how the country of the conqueror was fain to purge itself by penitence and trespass-offering, to atone for the unwilling sacrilege. All these vicissitudes of the ark, made familiar by repetition, and commended both by patriotism and by religious feeling, would be to him an early inspiration; and when, in the anointing of the prophet, he received the first monition of his destined greatness, we cannot wonder that the purpose should

be born in his heart, that through all change he would care for the ark of the Lord.

Yes! he "heard of it at Ephratah," that favoured spot which was rich in a heritage of promise, though "little" among the thousands of Judah. And when it abode in the citadel of Kirjath-jearim, he "found it in the fields of the wood." There was no search nor concern for the ark during the stormful reign of Saul. It abode in Kirjath-jearim, through the alternate victories and reverses of the people, for the space of twenty years. But when David was established upon the throne, the purpose of his youth, which he had cherished through all his adverse fortunes, loomed up clear and strong; and his first recorded act, after the elders of Israel had sworn their fealty in Hebron, was to propose the bringing back of the ark of the Lord. It was the earliest occasion on which it was possible for him to have displayed his regard. Times of tumult and conflict constrain the hiding of the purpose in the heart. Times of establishment and rest are the times for its avowal and execution. The Church testifies and endures, when the armies gather and the faggots blaze; but when the hosts are disbanded and the fires quenched, her pieties and missions begin. So in the mind of the devoted king. God had given him rest from his enemies, but he debarred himself from slumber—"I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." It would be difficult to find anywhere a finer example of single-hearted devotion. Nor was this a mere spasm of zeal, aroused into convulsive activity by awakened

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memory ; it was the well-considered attachment of a life. Not only did he track the ark in its wanderings, rejoice to restore it to the holy city, celebrate its return with gladness, and provide reverently for its accustomed service ; but in his prosperity, when the hands of his enemies were restrained from harm, the contrast pressed painfully upon him between his palace and the ark's frail pavilion. It was not meet that the Lord should have the canvas for an abiding-place, and the king the cedar—"See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." The devoted spirit shrank from the unseemly honour. The sacred symbol ought to have a sacred shrine. Hence arose the great thought of the temple, where the Highest might make his "rest," and dispense his blessing. Though the fire of youth was gone, and the wearied spirit, vexed by many persecutions, chafed for its well-earned repose, the eagerness of religious desire overcame the apathy of age ; and the man after God's own heart longed to gird himself, that he might arise and build. Heaven had willed otherwise ; but the purpose was accepted for the deed, and the great, brave, beautiful *thought* went up, and remained a "memorial" before God.

You will now see the fitness with which, assuming Solomon to have been the writer of the psalm, the first of its petitions should be, "Lord, remember David." And, dear brethren, these are the men who are required in the churches of to-day—men of large hearts, catholic sympathies, manly in the world's arena, genial in human citizenship, but reserving their intensest affection for the ark and house of God. If there be any principle

in our religion, if the obligation to worship be felt to be anything more than a seemly form, or an irksome impost upon time and thought; if the idea of God within us be, not that of a remote and impersonal Divinity, but of a Being warm, near, watchful, provident—the “living God” of our trusting heart and of our crying soul—then surely it were mockery to render any homage but the truest at his footstool, or to offer any gifts but the chiefest on his altar. The old heathen understood this matter better. Their eyes were blinded, and their rites were cruel, but they never erred in this. The goodliest spoil, the most fragrant libation, the fairest in the stall, the nearest to the heart, were reserved to be devoted to their gods. And shall we, heirs of all the ages, and of all the economies, on whom God has caused to shine a sun in his meridian of privilege—shall we anger our God against us by our selfish indifference to his claims, or by our unfilial withholding of his honour? We, to whom he has given every faculty which makes us capable of God, shall *we* banish him from the hearts which he asks but to brighten and redeem? We, to whom he has allotted a day so clear and brilliant, shall we insult him with the refuse of our time? We, who are dependent on his bounty for our wealth and for our power to amass it, shall we dole out our small pittance for his cause as the coarse miser churl who parts with coin like blood? I would impress it upon my own heart, and I would call upon you, with all possible solemnity and earnestness, to answer this invocation. If there has been unfaithfulness in the past, let our penitence mourn it, and let our consecration remove it to-day.

We are gathered on an occasion when a renewed covenant is seemly. The house, holy and beautiful, the offering upon which men look, has received its dedication. Let the heart, holier and more beautiful—redeemed at cost, oh, how infinitely greater!—the offering upon which God looks, receive its dedication too. It is but little at the best that we can offer. Our collective wealth would be absorbed by one single city's needs. Our influence, at its widest, is contracted within a narrow range. The shadows gather swiftly upon the noon of our longest day. We are feeble, and half our time must be spent in sleep, that we may recruit our strength. We are frail, and death, standing by, laughs at our arithmetic when we calculate on future years. We receive unfinished labours from our fathers, and transmit them, still unfinished, to our children. Watchmen in the night, it is not given to us to tarry until the morning. Guardians of the battle flag, we can but wave it gallantly for a while, for our hands will stiffen, and our comrades will bury us before the conflict's close. But the present is ours. We have room to work and light to work in. There are passionate needs, and ample opportunities, and great encouragements, and facilities such as no age ever possessed for honest work for God. Now, "who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" Give him your hearts, dear brethren; your costliest and most acceptable offering. The sordid and the worldly may despise your choice, but there await you on earth the smile of God, and the blessing of those that are ready to perish; and in heaven, the angel's welcome, and the conqueror's palm,

and the King's palace as the soul's home, and the King himself, in his beauty, as your "exceeding great reward."

II. On the prayer itself, we observe—1. That the temple is here spoken of as the "rest" or abiding-place of God. The original allusion is doubtless to the long wanderings of the symbol of his presence; and it marks a transition from the nomadic condition of the tribes to the compacted life of the nation; and a transfer of obligation suited to the change. When Israel was but a host of families, the ark dwelt within curtains contentedly, as if to show that God never forsakes his people, in regions ever so remote, or in wildernesses ever so dreary. But when Israel became a people, with a recognised government, law, justice, alliances, and every other evidence of a settled order of things, there must be permanence in the institution of worship also. In the free, wild life of the desert, with its perpetual migrations, the sacred tent might be pitched and struck like the others, and the breeze would fan the brows of the watchers of the ark as readily as it swept over the whole camp in slumber; but when the city was laid out for man, and its wealth became embodied in terrace and palace and garden, God would have his honoured house chiefest and costliest of all. Hence God's language in the wilderness was, "Where is the house that ye build for me, and where is the place of my rest?" But God's language to the anointed king, and the established kingdom, was, "The Lord hath chosen Zion. He hath desired it for his habitation." And it is so still.

The Christian dispensation, while it is the dispensation of universality, and bases its sanctions and promises upon the fact of spiritual worship, has not annulled the seemly and the sacred in connection with the worship of God. The false pride of "Gerizim" is humbled by its superior light; and the haughtiness which would build an exclusive altar at "Jerusalem" is rebuked by every word of its inspired lips; but it nowhere approves of the idea, that all places are equally sacred, or that God has ceased to find his "rest" in Zion, and to honour its services with his tokens of peculiar regard. There is a sentimental devotion which has become very fashionable in these modern times—a love for a spurious spirituality, which is commonly minced out from the lips of most unspiritual people; a kind of domestic Pantheism, which is too subtle in its religious homage to allow its flame of devotion to be kindled within "houses made with hands." It is true that the heart which God hath touched and fired will find him everywhere, in "the gracious prodigality of nature," and the bounteous ministries of life; but it is true also—a profounder truth in theory, and in fact a common experience—that God has special honours for the places which are set apart for his worship; and that the ear, tuned to the music of the sanctuary, is the keenest in its recognition of those tremulous airs of worship-song which are floating the whole universe around. God's preference for the places set apart for his service we cannot doubt, if we study Scripture aright: as in his plans the hour never strikes but the man is ready to meet it, and to do its work; so when the time for the building of the temple had come,

David's thought was perfected by the hand of his anointed son, and he was ready for the great design of his reign. As Bishop South has it: "It seems as if God had built a Solomon, that Solomon might build him a house." And to the perfecting of this design all natural and mental forces were laid under tribute. The royal Hiram sent his flotillas, and the subject Hiram graved and fashioned the material. Aholiab's cunning workmanship and Bezaleel's fair designs were pressed into the service. Jehiel the Gershonite poured out the accumulated treasures of David; and Asaph and his minstrels cheered the labour of the builders with song. And when the ark was brought in, bare of all external splendour, containing only the tables of the law and that mysterious presence, and when the whole company of the priests, sanctified for the occasion, took trumpets in hand, and the Levite singers, white-robed for the psaltery service, joined them, and the full chorus rose and swelled unto the Highest, then the lambent cloud came down: the priests, at once awed and enraptured, stayed the service in which they were unable to minister; and the "glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." And this was but typical of the attestation and blessing of the future. Hath he not announced it? "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." Have we not rejoiced in the inspired declaration, "Thy way, O Lord, is in the sanctuary"? Hath not the promise thrilled us many a time—"God is known in her palaces for a refuge," "I will glorify the house of my glory"? Yes! although our God is in the heavens, and his presence fills immensity; although there is not a

tiny orb which floats in the firmament that is forgotten in his administration, nor a straggling child upon the earth that is orphaned from his love and care—there is a sense peculiar, significant, and blessed, in which he “dwells” in Zion, and hath chosen the houses which are built for his honour as the places of his “rest.” Oh, to think of it! that we, if with unfeigned hearts and motives free from guile, we have contributed to the setting apart of this divine pavilion, have been brought into mysterious sympathy with the ineffable satisfactions of God, have helped to furnish a tablet on which he will “record his name,” have provided a theatre for the display of his highest, because his healing, power. And oh, infinite condescension! He, the sole inhabitant of eternity, in whose sight the heavens are not clean, and who charges his angels with folly, should stoop to rest in mean houses made with hands, and there, in presence invisible but felt, should deign to “sit, expecting until his enemies are made his footstool.”

We observe, again, *that the temple, gorgeous as it was, was incomplete and valueless without the ark.* There were the cedar and the shittim wood; there were the purple and the gold; the shrine was piled up with careful and costly elaboration; there was every appliance for worship and every expectation of gladness. David's thought flashed regal in the sunlight, beautiful in situation and in structure, a joy for the city, and a home for the Lord. But unless the Lord took possession, “the house was left unto” the builders “desolate,” alienated from the purposes of its construction—a lovely and decorated folly. And

surely it is true through all the ages. The ark in the temple is its life. Still the quick heart within the man; and you will have the stately skeleton soon. Withdraw the magic vapour, and the wheels whir no longer, and the most exquisite contrivances are mute and motionless machinery. Take the breath from the great organ's heart, and in vain you bid it discourse its harmonies. And as the heart to the man, as the steam to the engine, as the breath to the instrument of sound, so is the ark to the temple, because it is the symbol of the presence of the Lord. If you think of all the temple was to a Jew, you will see that there was the mysterious idea of an ever-present Divinity always in his mind. If he was in travel or in exile, he must turn to the temple at the hour of worship, as Daniel at the court of Babylon. If he had ceremonially transgressed, he could be purified only in the temple. If he had grievously sinned, in the temple was the only place of expiation. There and there only were the cup of salvation for gratitude, and the Urim and Thummim for counsel. And do not all these symbolize the one blessing? Is not the presence of God the underlying soul of them all? Who but he can bless, and purify, and atone, and accept, and counsel? And while his goings forth are in the creation of his hand, and all the might and marvel of nature tell of him, and he is felt in the skilful administration of the worlds, is it not in the sanctuary that his "way" is to be found, the "way" on whose high pavement he marches to subdue his enemies, and to be admired by all them that believe?

Dear brethren, there is no age which needs to be more deeply impressed with this truth than the age in which we live. Never were there so many runners in the valley of vision. Our organizations are multiplied. The very phases of the world around us have imparted, almost of necessity, a bustle and an earnestness to our religious life. Religion is no longer proscribed and unfashionable; it is the fairest badge of citizenship, and the truest certificate of honour. The danger now-a-days is from unseemly bearers of the cross rather than from malignant adversaries to it; and it is a danger which assails us all. We are too apt to vaunt of our institutions, of our efforts, of our sacrifices; and so damage our usefulness fatally, by putting the instrument in the place of the power. We have combined to build this house for God. It is costly, it is beautiful. Taste has conceived the design, and skill has wrought the execution; the ideal thought has grown into the stately pile. There are fair hopes which have found expression here, and fond associations that have slowly gathered here, and precious memories that have been embalmed and perpetuated here; and we assemble in the series of services that are to offer the building unto God. Here is the temple! Brethren, has the *ark* been brought in? Are we waiting for the accepting cloud? Will it content us that we have a goodly shrine, and attract many pilgrims, or do we wait with chiefest longing until the fire come down from heaven? Oh, what are all these external appliances unless filled with the presence of the Lord! Taste, colour, iris-hues of light, concord of sweet sounds, all that can rest the eye or

regale the ear ; what use are they for the filling of needs, for the healing of souls, for the snatching of ransomed men from peril and perdition ? I look around me, I admire ; there is fitness in the beauty, but it is dead beauty ; and in the midst of it my heart and my flesh crieth out for “ the *living* God.” Humanity needs him. Sinners cry out after him. Our souls, with upward longings, and passionate needs, and many hindrances, struggle to be satisfied in him. Dear brethren, there will be a curse upon our work, if he is not here. God forbid that we should be satisfied as miserably as were the Pharisees of old, who prayed to be seen of men, and who were seen of men, and so they *had* their reward. God forbid that our church should be for one moment destitute of the divine presence. That would be to make it but a stately sepulchre, with seemingly shrouds and fragrant spices—but without a Christ ; while poor weepers at the door, with wringing of hands, wail forth, “ They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.” With all possible earnestness I deprecate that doom ; and I summon you, men and women, whom God hath called, to pray that a result so ruinous may be averted from us, to pray with a power which Christ will make commanding, to pray with a hunger of heart which nothing but the divine presence will appease—“ Arise, O Lord, into thy rest ; thou and the ark of thy strength.”

Now notice for awhile *the other blessings, which are directly, or by obvious implication, asked for in the prayer.* The presence of God is the chief, the all-absorbing object of desire ; but that presence implies

its own diffusion in blessing. The same gracious Divinity which was not (reverently we speak it) satisfied in the solitudes of his own eternity, but created worlds as so many theatres for the display of his goodness in his power, could not abide in the temple like an Epicurean idol, engrossed in the contemplation of his own perfections, merely complacent in the homage which is offered at his shrine. God is known in the sanctuary, as Jesus in the days of his flesh, by blessing. "The ark of his strength" in the temple implies that those who are in communion with him may draw upon the resources of his power. He is there to exert it in the word, in the sacraments, in the ministers' appeals, and in the people's prayers. Yes, God's power is in the temple when *he* is there—power to make the sinner quail, and to sound the unbelieving heart—power to send the healing straight to the spirit of the wounded—power to bear down the vast and varied hindrances which interfere with the growth of the soul—power to make the wretched happy, and the selfish bountiful, and the whole man a nobler man, rising higher and still higher in divine civilisation until he reach the crown of Christian manhood, even the fulness of the stature of the perfect man in Christ. With a firm hold of this strength, how can our zeal be languid and our services fruitless? Will it not be sin for us to be weak when our God has furnished for our use this perpetual reserve of power? Believers, make yourselves strong in the thought of God's strength. The power which poised the worlds, and braided the light, and streamed forth the twin oceans of the water and the air; the power

which sustains all things, enabling the bright wings of the archangel for his ministry, and the small insect of a leaf for its gay dance of an hour ; the power which, in the grander future, will judge the universe and raise the dead—that power is in the ark of God's strength ; and surely in the sanctuary it is all enlisted on the side of mercy. It is not here the power of the lightning, which blasts while it brightens ; it is the power of the light, so gentle that it wakes no infant from slumber—so resistless, that it enlightens all.

The prayer then asks *that the "priests may be clothed with righteousness,"* which is, in fact, a petition for universal purity. You remember that we are in a new dispensation since that prayer was uttered, and that there is no priesthood now, except that of the Saviour in heaven ; and that of the whole community of the faithful, who are both "kings and priests unto God." It is a prayer, therefore, not only for us who minister, but for you who listen ; that we may be robed already in the new linen, clean and white, in which the saints were seen in vision. Righteousness is a word of comprehensive import, and includes everything that has been alleged of it, bearing upon the purification of the man before God. Do you speak of essential rightness, the laws of eternal and immutable truth ? They are in it. Do you speak of graceful charities, the flowering forth of the nature that is renewed into all things that are of good report and lovely ? They are in it. Do you speak of ethical morality, rigid obedience to a recognised commandment ? That is in it. Do you speak of

union with Christ, the benefits of whose atonement are amongst our own possessions, so that

“Jesus’ blood and righteousness
Our beauty are, our glorious dress”?

That is in it. It is Paul’s Thessalonian supplication embodied in a solemn litany—“Now the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And we are convinced, are we not? that this is one of the highest necessities of our church life. If we are to be a strong church, we must be a pure church. If our influence is to be fragrant, it must be by the savour of the knowledge of Christ. There may be attractiveness in our service, decorum and solemnity in our worship, compactness in our organizations, funds in our treasury, numbers in the retinue that follow where we worship God; but our strength is not in these things. The moral strength of a church is in the holy character of its members—character, not reputation, for it is a small thing to us to be “judged of man’s judgment”—character, that which we are in ourselves, and in the sight of God—character, which is the most lasting force in life, and which even death destroys not, for it enters into the very essence of the recompense of reward.

The third blessing asked for is holy joy in God. Joy which has its foundation in the sense of oneness with God, both in favour and feeling, and which has its outlet in the appropriate expressions of praise. This will indeed be a natural result of the possession of the

gifts already prayed for. If we take hold on God's power, and grow up into God's purity, we shall not lack material for praise. They must be blessed who reflect the Father's likeness, and who lean upon the Father's arm. And indeed the gifts act and react upon each other. The greatest weakness of the soul is sin. The strength of the Lord in us drives away that weakness which is misery; and then "the joy of the Lord," in beautiful reaction, becomes our strength for more loving and vigorous labour. To be strong, to be pure, and to be happy—can there be richer birth-gifts proffered on the church's natal day? And the loving Father has these in hand for his children. Even now his banner is over us; and in the royal banquet-house, we, the guests of the Divine, are invited to take these blessings from above. Brethren, are you ready? Then swell forth the prayer, "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest." And let all the people say, "Amen."

I can give but a few moments to *the bountiful answer to the prayer*—so prompt, so generous, so full. I am not going into any bewildering speculations about the mode and manner, in which God transforms our litanies into the blessings they supplicate. You know, you rejoice in the fact that God does answer prayer; and I wish, for your encouragement and my own, to remind you of just one discovery which a thoughtful student of the psalm will make—that in every case the answer is more large than the request. Look at it. It is very touching and very beautiful to see how the Lord, as if in compassion to human infirmity, remembers and dwells upon every point, in each case tenderly

intensifying the blessing. The first ten verses of the psalm are the prayer. In the eleventh, the answer begins. In the second verse, David sware unto the Lord; in the eleventh, "the Lord hath sworn in *truth* unto David." The petition is, "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest"—the answer, "This is my rest *for ever*." The prayer, "Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness"—the answer, "I will also clothe her priests with *salvation*," which is of righteousness the flower and crown and perfecting. The prayer, "Let thy saints shout for joy"—the answer, "And her saints shall shout *aloud* for joy." And then, as it were thrown in—the *largess of the King*—there are abundance and bounty, the blessings of the "lamp" and of the "horn"—that is, the gifts of Wisdom and Power; the discomfiture of his enemies (they robed, as the priests, only not with salvation but with shame); and on his head an ever-prosperous crown.

Ah! but God gives in godlike fashion. And is it not so in all his dealings with the race he has created and redeemed? Oh, the infinite richness with which our Father endows his children! Does he proffer mercy to the ungodly, the perverse, the rebel? In what words? "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Does he woo the wanderer, who in some dark hour has strayed? By what charm of loving speech? "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him." "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of

God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him." That is the princely style of benefaction—not after man's hard fashion, with the stern glance, and the cold censure, spoiling the gift by the manner of the giver ; taking the music out of kindness, making the generosity a matter of business. No, but free love, multiplied pardons, wisdom without upbraiding. Does he send forth his messengers on an arduous mission ? Yes, but not without a warm promise, like a Great-heart guide—"Lo, I am with you." Are those who believe put into possession of a peace ? What is its character ? Is it a flimsy and hollow serenity which springs from indifference, and is ruffled by disaster ? No, but a deep imperial quiet, which passeth all understanding. They inhale a joy also. What is its kind ? The mirth that doth not profit, or the laughter that is mad, shallow as the brook, and fugitive as the flash of lightning ? It is a joy unspeakable, and when it lights up the faces, as of Moses on the mountain, as of Stephen in the Jewish assembly, full of glory. They are promised victory over spiritual enemies ; but how ? A victory akin to defeat, so disastrous as to prompt the saying with the ancient captain, "Another such, and we are undone !"—a drawn battle, which the friendly night terminates, and whose issue is so doubtful that they have to send heralds to ask permission to bury their dead ? Nay, they are "*more* than conquerors." They are promised the inheritance of heaven ; but how ? Scarcely saved, saved so as by fire ; stealthily introduced, pursued to the very threshold by the avenger of blood ; smuggled in under the wing of

some guardian angel ; left to wind their solitary way along the golden streets, strangers without a welcome or a friend ? No ! but an entrance is ministered *abundantly*. They are in heaven, finally ; but in what estate ? Menials, permitted scant glimpses of the glory, hearing far-off echoes of the music ? Nay ; overpassing and wondrous grace ! they enter into his joy and sit down on his throne.

XXVII.

CHRIST, THE KING.

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?”
—Ps. ii. 1.

“THE Son” — “The King” — “The Anointed.”
Who is this personage, designated by these wonderful names? Are they to be explained by the thought of a triumphal ode, composed by a successful warrior in the moment of victory, and in his natural elation ascribing to himself such titles, and linking his cause with the Divine? So some have thought, and have named David as the warrior, and his victory over the Jebusites, and his capture of Zion, as the theme. But David, who wrote the Psalm, as is declared expressly in the Acts of the Apostles, must have changed his character if he could speak of himself thus boastfully. His loyal harp was never tuned to such self-praise. The strain swells too grandly to find its subject in any earthly potentate. The psalm must have a wider sweep, and a more affluent exposition. There is only one who can exhaust its grandeur; and on his vesture and on his thigh this name is written, “King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

We may assume, then, without further question, that the psalm is a psalm of Christ. Six times at least is it

quoted or referred to in the New Testament, and always in its Messianic application. Viewed in this aspect, it is unstrained and harmonious in its teaching. Christ's nature, mediation, enthronement, intercession, dominion, tenderness—all are here. Our hopes may be exalted, and our faithlessness warned. We may banish our fears as to his triumph. We may renew our pledges in his service; for "he must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet." It has been a very general opinion, that there is a close and fine relation between this psalm and the former one, which by common consent is placed at the beginning of these inspired odes. The second, in fact, seems to be the evangelical repetition of the first. That which in the first is predicated of the different state and destiny of the righteous and of the ungodly, is reaffirmed in the second, with special application to Messiah and the foes of his dominion. There are several interesting points of apposition and of contrast. The tumult of "the people who imagine" (or meditate) "a vain thing"—how sharply it contrasts with the serenely reflective attitude of the righteous, whose "meditation is in the law of the Lord day and night." The considerate warning, "Lest ye perish in the way"—how it answers to the announcement, "The *way* of the ungodly shall perish"! The burst of blessing with which the first Psalm begins—the burst of blessing with which the second Psalm closes—are they not, so to speak, the complement of each other? The full grand refrain, which inspired the harp at first, returned to when the minor airs are played out, and the skilful discords have ceased. "Blessed is the man that

walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly"—and then, after the opposition and its overthrow, as if in the presence of the fallen adversaries, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Another word upon the structure of the psalm. It is a beautiful poem, artistically divided, according to the rules of Hebrew rhythm, into cantos of equal length; and if we observe carefully the genius of the poetry, the true principles of its exposition will at once appear. Thus the psalm presents us with four topics of thought. The first three verses represent *the opposition now existing in the world against Messiah and his kingdom*. In the second strophe of three verses we have *the treatment of this opposition and its overthrow*. Then we have *the declared purpose of God, and its results*; and lastly, *the personal application of the whole*. I think you will readily discover a suitableness in this subject to the occasion upon which we meet; and while we address ourselves to a brief consideration of these thoughts, let us strive, by God's blessing, to be in full sympathy with the theme.

I. We gather from the psalm, that there existed a various and widespread opposition to Messiah's claims and kingdom. And if we look around us to-day, we may assure ourselves that the language was but a veritable prophecy of the times to be. Every expression, however forcible, will apply to the present relations of the world to the truth as it is in Jesus. One would have imagined that it would have been otherwise. When we think of the gentleness of Jesus, of the tender mercy of his government, and

of the blessings which he scatters in his train, the wonder is that there should be a rebel in the universe; and we marvel that the system which he founded should not have marched to universal conquest, and have found a shrine in every family, and a home in every heart. "But we see not yet all things put under him;" and the more we go out into the world, and are brought into contact with its prejudice and passion, the more we discover that the elements of opposition to the Saviour are yet fierce and active, and that "the carnal mind is enmity against God." Both as to the variety and as to the nature of the opposition, the declarations of the psalm are applicable now.

The hostility is said to be general. It was not circumscribed by national boundaries—a tribal enmity, unknown across a few parallels of latitude—the "heathen" in the far-off isles or in the hordes of barbarism; the "people" in their fenced cities, and under the shadow of privilege, are alike unfriendly—the Jew and the Gentile, equally inveterate in their hatred of the truth and of the true—the "kings of the earth," representatives of principality and power—and "the rulers," the controlling forces of men—the leaders of thought, the foremost in sagacity and influence, who are so often the mightier powers behind the throne—are arrayed against the Saviour in council and in arms.

The hostility is said to be angry and determined. It is not a war prompted by policy, but by the hardihood of defiance. There is anger in the eye, and enmity in the mind. The heathen rage, the people

are lashed into fury; the kings set themselves in dogged tenacity of resentment; there is a tumult of stern and of vindictive feeling.

The hostility is said to be organized. It is not individual perverseness, the brooding in isolation over some scheme of revenge. There is a conspiracy. They meditate combined action. They take counsel together. Opposing interests are reconciled for the one purpose. Private feuds are in abeyance. There are hollow courtesies between sometime enemies. "Herod and Pilate are made friends," that, with united interest and alliance, they may war against the Christ of God.

The hostility is said to be the recoil from wholesome restraint and submission. This is the secret of it all. They fret against authority. Each, inflated with a mistaken notion of liberty, craves to do that only which is right in his own eyes. They ask a stone, and deem it the man's true bread. They long for that licence which is sternest bondage, and would barter for it that service which is perfect freedom. This is the great rallying-cry which summons them to battle: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

Are not these descriptions both prophecy and history? Do not these elements combine in the opposition to the truth, against which we are called to contend? Although the gospel has been preached for centuries, and has had its witnesses in every sphere of influence, so general is the derangement from primitive order, that it is manifest that there is still the presence of a foul and active spirit of evil.

To whatever department we direct our survey, however ample the range over which we extend it, the result is the same. In the nations which have not known the gospel, in the nations in which it has been defectively exhibited, in the common practice of unrenewed men, in the current thought of the masses, in their systems of organized action and so-called worship—there are these elements of opposition to the truth. Sometimes there is denial, sometimes there is forgetfulness of God; and these are the dispositions which lead to impatience and hostility. How many are there who *love* darkness and its deeds! There are around us the audacities of rebellion. Education gilds and graces crime. Science *has* been used to initiate into the mysteries of cruelty; and to those who ponder moral questions and mourn over moral ruins, such are the daily freaks of novel and eccentric evil, that it seems as if the ruler of the darkness of this world had gathered the lords of his court to banquet, and was using men, like so many fallen Samsons, to make sport for them of the nature which he has corrupted and enslaved. If you advance higher in the scale of social life, is there not often, in commerce, in science, in pleasure, the same impious dethronement of God? There is many an honest worldling who would hardly understand his conscience, if it were to press him with a thought of the Divine—"God is not in all his thoughts." All his schemes of aggrandisement, and even of benevolence, are prompted by motives in which Jehovah has no memorial. Habitually stifling all higher principles of action, it becomes neither unusual nor alarming to

him that he should no longer recognise a God, because for all practical purposes he has made Jehovah an exile from the creation of His own hand. In all false systems which have adulterated the truth, and perverted the ways of God, there are couched the same principles of rebellion. Think of the barbaric rites of paganism. Think of the fanaticism of the just-waking nations of the East, of their intolerance of Christianity, of their stubbornness in ancient error, as if they "set themselves" to defend it with all the courage of despair. Truly "the heathen rage," where they do not slumber, and the embodied "mind" that is carnal "is enmity against God." Think again of the cruelties of superstition and imposture, of unchristian crimes perpetrated in the name of Christianity, of the martyr-piles which light up the hills of Papal strength so luridly; of Mohammedan blood-thirstiness, of despotic edicts, confiscations, banishments, martyrdoms. Or look into the inner severities of superstitious and heathen systems; how arduous their vigils—how severe their lacerations of the flesh—how searching and humbling their penances! Truly "the people imagine a vain thing," for the gods of the heathen smite their worshippers, and in a thousand ways in which rebellion against God prompts to cruelty and wrong, there is verified the sad announcement of the word, "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god." The last and ripest form in which this rebellion displays itself, is the deposition of the Most High as the object of worship, and his deposition in favour of treacherous, licentious, and cruel intruders. There is not an attri-

bute of the Divine nature which idolatry does not insult. His unity is insulted by the "gods and lords many" of the world's rabble Pantheon. His spirituality is affronted by divinities inflamed with human passion, and wearing material forms. He is omnipresent—idolatry insults him by independent and local deityships, which oftentimes war against each other. Above all, he is holy—and idols, photographs of the natures of their artificers, are "earthly, sensual, and devilish."

Brethren, to human seeming, there is room to be disheartened by these numerous and subtle foes. And if you regard every impurity, and every oppression, every implacable system, and every sacrifice offered to an idol as the embodiment of rebellious *mind*, the prospect becomes appalling. It is the alienated human intellect and feeling in all these things that gives to the rebellion all its mischievous energy of life. The censer were without significance, but for the deluded mind which swings it; the fetish rite a dumb cruelty, but for the mind which gloats over its dripping blood; the idol, but for the mind which crouches to it, an ugly but a harmless lie. But it is *mind* in opposition to *mind*—the human against the eternal—the thing that is made lifting itself against the Being who made it—that which was created on purpose to be capable of God, and to glorify him by intelligent and earnest service, given over to other authority—warped from its original design—"setting itself" to conspire against its Maker, and to "break the bands" of his merciful government asunder. The thought is terrible, but it is the truth, as we see

it in the opposition of the world to-day. Who grieves not over an apostasy so dire? Brethren, it should be ours—who by the grace of God have had our own alienation reconciled, and our own perverseness overcome—to spare neither effort nor sacrifice, if haply we may help to make these “wars to cease,” and to “bring these desolations to a perpetual end.”

II. The second portion of the psalm reveals to us *the treatment of this opposition, and its overthrow.*

The calm voice of prophecy does not falter, nor is the eternal purpose disturbed by the rage, and the conspiracy, and the defiance. It is as might have been expected. When the worm lifts itself against the chariot, the chariot rolls on unheeding, but the worm is crushed. When the potsherds of the earth strive together, the issue may be doubtful, because they war on equal terms; but human craft can never frustrate divine counsels, nor human power prevail against the strength of an almighty arm. Hence, while the armies are marshalled and the tumult swells, and all is haste and passion below, there is imperial quiet above; for God “sitteth in the heavens,” unmoved, and regardeth all the hostile preparations with the triumph of supreme disdain—“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh—the Lord shall have them in derision.” The contempt continues, but the persistence in opposition moves the Highest to anger, and the indignant voice rebukes their folly—“Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath.” Their pertinacity in fruitless but malignant strife brings down severer judgments—“Then shall he vex them in his sore

displeasure." Refusing to be warned, and daring the law's uttermost thunders, they come under the terrible sentence—"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." This is the order of God, in dealing with contumacious rebels. Expostulation first, then the reproof of anger, then the visitations of judgment, then the stern repression of the conquered, as captives at the chariot-wheels; and then, in the last resort, "destruction from his presence, and from the glory of his power."

And, dear brethren, looking at the bearing of these words upon Christ's great work in the world, may not the past testify to the future, and history give to prophecy the assurance of fulfilment, and the hope of her completed desire? How much heathen rage has been bootlessly expended! What multitudes of "vain things," imagined by the people in their folly, have collapsed into kindred vanity! The Jewish rulers "imagined" that they had strangled the new faith in its birth, and that in the "sepulchre hewn out of a rock" lay buried both the impostor and his doctrine; but Christianity is living still, mightiest among the moral forces of the world. The Roman emperors "imagined" that their sway extended over the consciences as over the bodies of their subjects, and endeavoured to make this sway absolute by sword and fire. Persecution lifted up herself against the faithful; Christians were cast by human tigers to the more merciful tigers of the arena; the blood of the saints was "shed like water, and there was none to bury them;" but the red rain only made

the harvest whiter and ampler ; and the cry of the dying Julian, in the moment of defeat and despair, was the wail of the tyranny of the whole Roman world—“O Galilean ! thou hast overcome.” Kingdoms have set themselves against the religion of Jesus. There have been nations, whose entire policy has been intolerance and wrong, or which have been given over to luxurious and cruel idolatry. Where are they now ? Their influence has declined. The congresses of empires know them no longer ; and where “the strongest fabrics of power have spent themselves in the struggle,” and the quarrel has been waged to the end, you cannot trace their site upon the map. The owl and the dragon inhabit the palaces of their princes, or another speech has driven theirs among forgotten dialects, and another race has succeeded to their inheritance of power. “The nation and kingdom which will not serve thee shall perish ; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.”

There have been times when this opposition has gathered to a head, and there has seemed to be a concentration of hostile force and effort for a decisive issue. Such, for example, as Romanism made when she sent forth some merciless Alva, or lit the fires for Lollard martyrdoms, or whetted her swords for a St. Bartholomew slaughter, or gilt the prows of the Invincible Armada. Such, for example, as Infidelity made, when she mustered the wits, sages, and philosophers of the Encyclopædia for their marvellous and pronounced atheism : but how vain the thing which they imagined ! The result of the former experiments was but to show the indestructibility of

Truth, "which, pressed to earth, will rise again: the eternal years of God are hers." The result of the other was but to confirm the faith of the believing, and to rouse them from a passive holding of their hope to a determined purpose to spread its influences even "to the uttermost ends of the earth;" for it must never be forgotten that in the throes of that great struggle the missionary enterprises of the churches were born. Good old Nehemiah quaintly announces one of the loving secrets of Jehovah's power: "Howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing." This is indeed his favourite mode of working—to make his enemies vassals to his purposes; to constrain passion into the reluctant energy, which in spite of itself works for its own overthrow; and to make all things, however adverse or contrary, subserve the loving counsels of his will. In all cases mercy longs to triumph over judgment. He would rather rule even his enemies "with a rod of iron," than "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." And yet there have not been wanting instances, in which continued resistance has led to the withdrawal of privilege, and has entailed a retribution long delayed, but sure. Egypt, Babylon, Nineveh, Tyre—where is their glory? They were the oppressors of God's people. Where is the strength of Baal-Peor? or what music sounds out now from Nisroch's stately fane? The very soil of some of them has been swept by the ploughshare of desolation; the Pyramids entomb the pride as well as the dust of the Pharaohs, and the sphinx stares out vacantly upon twenty centuries of ruin. The Jewish nation, so long chosen, so long borne with, heirs to so

affluent a heritage of privilege—how sadly have they forfeited their birthright! and now, “without a prince, and without an ephod, and without teraphim,” they carry about with them the pang and shame of disinheritance, and are tribes of the wandering foot and weary hand, because “they have rejected the counsel of God against themselves.” The seven churches of Asia, whose angels were honoured by personal and special revelation from heaven—there is not a glimmer of light in the sockets of their broken candlesticks now. Once lifted to the skies in solemn elevation of privilege, they were faithless, self-sufficient, rebel—and now the hoof of the Mussulman tramples the fields where their temples of worship stood.

Brethren, God must be glorified, either by the submission or by the destruction of those who oppose his rule. His vindication of his own supremacy may not always be manifest, when human impatience would demand it. He is in no unseemly hurry. He sees the end from the beginning. To him the deed is determined, and he can wait for it through the patient years. In the midst of the heathen’s rage, and of the people’s meditated vanity, he sits unmoved, and stills all misgiving for his servants by the announcement of his royal pleasure: “Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.” “He *must* reign.” All enemies shall be subdued unto him. “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” It is comforting to the heart of the church, a gracious rebuke to our unbelief, a hallowing inspiration to our labour, that there—on the throne already—is the King: God’s King and our King—“Immanuel, which

being interpreted is, God with us." Does our faith languish in the disheartened toil against prevailing wickedness and wrong? Are we tempted, like the despondent prophet, to retire chafed to desert dreams and broodings? The King is on the throne, and his eye is over the whole field, and he sees the nearing victory. Are we apt to grow melancholy as we trace the slow progress of Christianity—as we think of error sturdily maintaining its ancient boundaries, of truth spreading slowly and with difficulty, of defections in our own ranks, of Peter's craven denial, and Thomas' sense-bound spirit, and John's too hasty censoriousness, and Judas' traitor-kiss—all reproduced in modern type and fashion? The King is on the throne, and he knows whom he has chosen. He can make the weaknesses of men become their strengths, and, spite of every infirmity and of every hindrance, he can use unlikely means for the advancement of his kingdom. There may come a hush upon every tremor of the believing heart, a calm upon the unrest of every troubled spirit, in that one assurance, imperial and everlasting: "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion."

III. We have the announced purpose in fulfilment of which our faith may be encouraged, and our hope inspired: "I will declare the decree." The eternal purpose shall be set in clearer light. It had been less explicitly made known already. To keep the world's heart from fainting, the first promise broke through the darkness of the Fall, and gave assurance of personal suffering, but of ultimate triumph, on the part of the

Redeemer; but now the words swell as with the blast of a clarion, and the note is of exultation and gladness, for the identity of the Redeemer is discovered; and he who aforetime has been known as the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the Shiloh who blessed expiring Jacob, the Angel of the Covenant, the Divine Prophet, is now revealed in all his majesty and renown as the brightness of the Father's glory, God's own and only Son—"I will declare the decree." It shall be the burden of all subsequent revelation. The seer's vision shall be full of it; the prophetic strain shall swell it forth more rapturously; it shall strike the minstrel's harp to the exclusion of all meaner themes; it shall cause the hearts of devout worshippers to throb with a strange joy: the talk of it shall lift ordinary men into prophets, and upon the sons and daughters of the spiritual commonwealth shall the inspiration come; and in the completed canon of the word, its Apocalypse shall usher in the jubilee of earth and heaven. And this has been literally fulfilled. You would have a blank Scripture, if you could delete from it the declarations touching the kingdom and triumph of Jesus. The heart of the Bible, like the heart of the believer, "is full of Christ, and cannot from his praise forbear."

But there are further substantial guarantees for the fulfilment of this Divine word, that unbelief may be driven from its last resting-place, and that we may be stimulated to develop all our resources in helpful service. These guarantees are to be found in the predictions of the resurrection, the intercession, and the perpetual enthronement of Jesus. Get the comfort

out of these thoughts. "The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Whatever reference these words may have to the Divine Sonship of the Messiah, there is an undoubted reference to that marvellous exertion of power by which he rose from the dead. This is proved conclusively by the quotation of the passage by St. Paul in that effective discourse of his in the synagogue of Antioch, recorded in Acts xiii. 32, 33: "And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." You will remember further, that in the Revelation of St. John one of the titles applied to Christ is "the first begotten of the dead."

Now the Saviour's resurrection is a pledge of his universal triumph, because it attests the fulfilment of his mission, it vindicates his ability to overthrow the mightiest adversaries, and it proves the acceptance of his work in the counsels of the Father. If there was a period at which the issue was in suspense at all, it was when the Saviour lay powerless in the tomb. If that sepulchre had been filled on the Easter morning, if the stone lay gloomy at the mouth of it, if the linen clothes still shrouded and embalmed a corpse, then we might have gone away with wringing of hands and sorrow, and have wailed out a long farewell to our Master's triumph, or the world's hopes of life. The charnel would have been the end of being; there would have been no outlet at the further end; death,

the enemy, would have frustrated the Divine plan, and have reigned over a vassal universe which, upon the fortunes of its Redeemer, had staked and lost its all. "But now is Christ risen from the dead." "The rising God forsakes the tomb; the tomb in vain forbids his rise"—and in that rising all humanity lives; the strong man armed is crippled in all the resources of his authority. "Because Christ lives, we shall live also." The pledge of final and complete triumph is in that broken seal and forsaken grave. "He is declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead." Moreover, there is the Saviour's prevalent and perpetual intercession: "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." There is a power in his pleading, backed as it is by the fact of his accepted propitiation, which is resistless. And the asking is perpetual. He does it through the lips of tens of thousands of his followers. Wherever the sacramental host gathers, wherever the believer's closet is pitched, wherever the lips of childhood lisp "Thy kingdom come," in their bright, happy faith, which is the symbol of the faith that prevaieth everywhere—there is the intercession which he accepts and adopts, adding to it the fragrant incense of his own advocacy. He does it himself in heaven. The "Ask of me" finds its continual answer there. He shows his finished work. He pleads for the fulfilment of the covenant. He asks that the glowing prophecies may receive their accomplishment, that all heaven and all earth may witness that he has overcome principalities and powers, and "makes a show of

them openly," and that so the completeness and universality of his dominion may be assured to the universe of God.

Brethren, can he plead in vain? The asking is perpetual. There is no pause in that ceaseless intercession. The ages roll on, generations of men flourish and fade, dynasties are established and uprooted, nations pass away as the foam upon the crest of the wave, there comes a shadow upon the youth of the ocean, and a tremor of age upon the everlasting hills; but through all change, and through all ages, the smoke of the incense which comes with the prayers of saints ascends up before God out of the angel's hand. And then there is Christ's perpetual enthronement: "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." The holy hill of Zion, upon which he is set as King, is a heavenly, not an earthly mountain. From the triumph on the cross, and the triumph in the sepulchre, he ascended to the perpetual triumph on the throne. His ascension was the last royal fact in the series—Prophecy, Advent, Expiation, Resurrection, Empire. And it is our Immanuel, who is thus exalted King of kings and Lord of lords. He did not drop the body as he entered into the cloud of ascension. The humanity to which he had stooped, which he had worn, in which he had suffered and triumphed, shared the glory as it had shared the agony and shame. And it is our Jesus, ours still, ours always, who sits on the right hand of power, and who wields the sceptre of the worlds.

We may rest here. Christ risen—Christ interceding—Christ enthroned. Then bring your offerings, and offer your prayers, and consecrate yourselves and your service, for you are enlisted on the winning side. Cease your labour, disorganize your societies, despond hopelessly and for ever, if you believe in a dead Christ. The enemy will overthrow you; the fiends will be too many for you; the world's woes will mock you to relieve them—if you have any misgiving on this matter. But if you have a living faith in a living Jesus, God with God as man with men; if you know and feel that you are working, not so much to win the world from sin, as to win the world for Christ; if you realize the fulness of that promise, whose music is louder than the din of the tempest at its wildest—"Lo, I am with you alway; even unto the end of the world"—then you can subdue kingdoms, and stop the mouths of lions, and quench the violence of fire, and turn to flight the armies of the aliens, and confront an embattled world, and dare the fiercest demons of the pit and of the flame.

XXVIII.

THE MEETNESS FOR THE INHERITANCE.

“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”—COL. i. 12.

YOU remember that the Apostle Paul, in his magnificent argument for the resurrection, recorded in the fifteenth of Corinthians, makes use of this remarkable expression, to which the hearts of believers render their attesting witness: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” Sad indeed would be the condition of our race, if you bereave us of our hopes of immortality.

The allotment of death would become an unmitigated evil; all earthly hopes and enterprises would close darkly in the inevitable sepulchre; the wailing would shriek out from vacant hearths and homes, “Man lieth down and riseth not;” and he, who was but yesterday rejoicing in his widespread kindred, to-morrow would be bereft of love and hope, a solitary mourner over many tombs. But “life and immortality” have been “brought to light by the gospel.” A new and glorious illustration has flashed upon the purposes of God; the voyage of life is no longer a hopeless peril; the grave is not the goal of being; there is nothing to hinder the perfection of existence; the

worms batten on the clay, but the manhood of the man, indestructible and undecaying, may grow up into the Deity for ever. The special ground of the Apostle's thanksgiving in the chapter before us is this anticipation of a future and blessed existence. He expresses it variously, and we meet with it as "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven"—"the hope of the gospel"—"the hope of glory"—"the inheritance of the saints in light." For this inheritance he regards all events of time, all dispensations of providence, as fitting the believer; and to acknowledge and to celebrate this riches of God's grace, he calls upon the church for its exulting praise.

In connection with this passage, our thoughts may very profitably dwell upon the following idea:—

The preparation necessary for a future and blessed state of being.

There is far more alliance between this world and the next than we are apt sometimes to imagine. By the infidel the present life is talked about as a mere parenthesis between two eternities, bearing no affinity to either; a brief history of abortive plans and aimless being; a day of strife and storm, emerging from eternal night and hasting rapidly to be engulfed in the same unbroken darkness. Even by many who would shudder at the ravings of scepticism, and who deem themselves sound in the faith, there is recognised no *direct* and *personal* connection between the present and the future. Indeed, it may be doubted whether any of us are sufficiently alive to the thought that this life is not merely a state of probation, but of discipline; that in all our words and works we are scattering seed

that is imperishable ; and that those trifles which we affirm do make the sum of earthly character are shaping that character for ever. How important in this aspect is the life we now live in the flesh—the seed-time of an everlasting harvest, the childhood of an immortality ! This truth is pressed in solemn utterance upon the triflers of the world—“ Be not deceived : God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” And the awards of the great day of retribution are to stamp indelibly upon the spirit, as it passes to its happy or blasted eternity, the character which it has woven for itself—“ He that is unjust, let him be unjust still ; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still ; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still ; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”

It will not be necessary to remind you of the original taint of the nature we inherit, nor of its complete estrangement from all that is spiritual and holy. “ The natural man,” you will at once concede, “ knoweth not the things of the Spirit of God.” “ The carnal mind is enmity against God.” It is manifest, therefore, that a change must pass upon our hearts and habits to adapt us for a residence in that heaven, where God is in his essential presence, and where everything is but the reflection of his purity and glory.

The necessity for this change would seem to be forced upon us by every analogy with which in this life we are familiar. In the world around us there is a mutual adaptation of the creature to his dwelling-place,

and of the dwelling-place to the creature, which cannot fail to strike the most thoughtless observer. The earth has been evidently made for man, and man has been as evidently furnished for a joyous existence upon the earth. The eye with its delicate lenses, the ear with its wondrous conductors, the body with its highly elaborate mechanism, adapted as they respectively are for light and sound and life, are all evidences of this beautiful harmony.

There have been theologians who, by their depreciation of the world in which we live, have seemed to think that there was some subtle and original connection between matter and sin. The burden of their teaching has been austerity and sadness. They have ignored all Scripture except the passages which tell of self-denial; and they have applied them to external circumstances, rather than to the state of the affections in the inner man. According to them, there should be a perpetual cloud upon the brow, and a uniform sequestration from all sources of earthly enjoyment. They have harped upon the worthlessness of the world and the blessedness of death with an earnestness, which might almost justify suicide in some of their frenzied followers, and they have deemed that the best preparation for an estate of honour in the next life is to deform and desolate and darken this. Now we humbly think, that the adaptations to which we have referred furnish the best rebuke to this savage theology. The world is made for us, and we are adapted for the world. Our organs and senses find pleasure in its objects and sounds; and to undervalue it as the scene of our existence, or to deem it a misfortune that we were

ever introduced within its bounds, is to affront our Maker by the despising of the gifts of his bounty, and to reverse the appointed ordinance of God. No, this world is not a donjon-keep, in which the cribbed spirit, like a mighty captive, pines and chafes for freedom. God has made it a very Alhambra of beauty and fitness, apart from the defilements of sin. Where the sin does exist, it is not in the world, but in the man. There is no mischief in the waving woodland. There is no frivolity in the laughing stream. The hoary mountains tower in adoration, not in rebellion. The songsters of the grove and of the tree warble no treason against heaven in their melodies. All nature is loyal to her God, and, "not willingly made subject to vanity"—now in silent reverence, and now in voiceful numbers—peals out her Maker's praise.

We cannot forget that from the natural recoil against a faith so gloomy as that we reprobate, infidelity has artfully woven one of her most popular schemes. With her usual disingenuousness, charging upon Christianity the faults and follies of its mistaken friends, she has reasoned that if the world to come be the exclusive sphere and hope of the Christian, it is necessary that some should come to the rescue of the present, insist upon palpable duties, and exalt a life for which we are so evidently adapted and prepared. Hence dressing her old falsehoods in somewhat seemlier guise, she has come forth as Secularism—the champion of the selfishness which she embodies—and would chain the energies of the man within the sphere of present and palpable things. Brethren, we are not disposed to yield one hair's-breadth to this impudent

belief. Off, ye rude intruders! Ye trespass upon the crown-lands of our Master, Christ; ours, by virtue of our charter of union, "for we are Christ's; and Christ is God's." "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." She claims both worlds; the present to toil, the future to rest: in the present, by God's good help, to gain the mastery over self and sin, to divorce the soul from all lingering affection towards evil, and to gather round the character the spirit-life in all its blended gracefulness and strength; in the future—all sin eradicated, all holiness brought in—to rejoice in all the raptures of a perfected nature, and in all the fruitions of a perfected state: in the present, to care for and bless our fellows, to minister to minds diseased and souls in trouble, to regard none as hopeless, but to invite them to closer companionship by assuring them of eternal union; in the future, to gaze on the ransomed, all clustering around the throne—a joyous brotherhood, with no fears upon the spirit, no spot upon the beauty of holiness, all tears wiped away from the eye. Oh, a rare and pleasant land seemeth the life that now is, as it down-lieth under the Sun of Righteousness, and has reflected on it the bright shadow of a large immortality! In this—its proper aspect to regard it—it is a sunny and a beautiful thing to live. And oh! when we look abroad upon this world of ours, with its glow and its gladness, its kindly sympathies, its large yearnings, its majestic hopes, its landscapes all ministrant to our sense of beauty, its harmonies evoking the latent music in our souls, its rare extraction of public happiness

from the sorrows and perils of individual lot, its flowers that spring from tombs, and even the clouds that occasionally darken it, weeping sweet tears upon its bosom—what wonder is there that man in presence of nature should break out in the impassioned utterance—

“This world is very lovely, O my God ;
I thank thee that I live”?

While man in grace, linking it with the invisible, takes up the strain in loftier poetry and sublimer faith—“He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.”

If then there be on earth this wondrous adaptation of the creature to his residence, we have only to extend the analogy that we may understand the meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. To create enjoyment for a man, there must be agreement between inward tastes and outward objects. If you want to make a man happy upon earth, you must surround him with favourable circumstances. Let competence crown his position, and friends troop to his dwelling ; let him have greetings in the market, and applauses from the press ; let gaiety crowd his halls, and health bloom upon his cheek, and servants go at his bidding ; let him not withhold his soul from the countless pleasures with which the world festoons the track of its travellers. You have given him all things richly to enjoy. Let the same tastes retain their ascendancy, and the same external circumstances exist, and you might make the man happy in heaven. But the circumstances of heaven have been fixed already, and they are changeless. Happiness there depends upon certain

conditions of mind, which the natural man has not. It is not enough, therefore, to make a heaven to a sinner, that the place should be prepared for him; *he* must undergo a preparation for the place. It is not enough that he have the title-deeds, he must have the personal meetness; it is not enough that the forensic change have passed upon his state, the transforming change must pass upon his character. And if he could enter into heaven with his earthliness unrestrained, and his impurity reigning—without the creation of a new heart and the renewal of a right spirit—heaven would be unparadised to him; its music would be a discord, its service a drudgery, and its atmosphere of holiness insufferable to his diseased and leprous soul.

Brethren, we press this consideration upon you. How is it with yourselves? Has the kingdom of heaven come to you (mark the terms) “in word only,” or “in power”? It is perfectly possible for you to dwell upon it with enkindled imagination, while yet you have not advanced in the very humblest degree of progress towards that character which alone can fit you for its enjoyment. You have perhaps wept over some recent tomb, and closed the eye which used to flash forth its comforting welcomes. In the time of your bereavement your thoughts were uplifted to heaven, and there came a soothing upon your spirit with the hope of a resurrection, in which those severed ties should be renewed, and friends should neither weep nor change in the unintermitting reunions of the sky. Or in the times of your reverie, when you have been impressed with the frailty of the things of sense, you have reposed upon the thought of a material heaven, which should

retain all earth's beauty, but be unchequered by its vicissitudes and unstained by its defilement. Some such conception has floated before you as that which the daring painter has embodied in "The Plains of Heaven." Waters which storm never ruffles, and sky which clouds never shade; the air laden with showers of sweetest sound; the ever-young inhabitants, each one a crowned harper unto God, abiding in security for ever; and as the voluptuous vision has dazzled you, you have sighed forth in your weariness, "Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest!" Or the main object of your contemplation and desire may be the universal benevolence which will obtain in heaven; its genial cordiality—no look sinister, no purpose unfriendly, the light of a cloudless transparency shining in every character, and reflecting only the sincerities of a brotherhood without guile—and you may vehemently desire to be free from earth, that land of tortuous policy, and craft, and selfishness, and to dwell in that abode of love. It is possible for you to have conceived any or all of these opinions about heaven, and in these aspects it may be the object of your earnest desire; and yet there may be not one particle of preparation for the real heaven of the Bible. You have sighed after a paradise of friendship, or a paradise of sentiment, or a paradise of poetry, and yet there has been in you no painstaking endeavour to mortify the deeds of the body, and to cultivate those affections which are the very essence of the recompense of reward. Alas! men dream about universal benevolence while all uncharitableness is cherished in their hearts; they talk largely of the rest and psalmody of

heaven, with no holy purpose in the heart and no holy practice in the life: nay, such is the marvellous depravity of the nature we inherit, the man can stand at the grave's mouth, and there, with the unconscious corpse confined in its narrow house before him, and amid all that is graceful in external sorrow, he can indulge rancorous feeling, and plot schemes of broader worldliness; and he can go home from that funeral, to fling himself with keener zest into the strife for gold; and all the impressions of eternity, hastily roused up within him in that brief episode in his history, are but the unreal visions which had gathered round his spirit in a dream. Oh, I do solemnly believe that there are some in this sanctuary to-day—God send the word with power to your hearts!—who are dreaming of heaven in vain, and just because you are not anxious for this personal meetness, because you have no delight in prayer, no devotional enjoyment in praise, no strong yearnings after the likeness of God, no upward growth into a holy character; however rapturously your imaginations may kindle with the thoughts of a fictitious heaven, the true recompense of God's Bible and of God's promise is a recompense you will never reach, because it is a recompense you are not fitted to enjoy.

Oh, ponder this matter, I beseech you. You educate your children; in God's name, I charge you educate yourselves. With your children you commence the training early. You watch over their culture with care. You prescribe rules to improve the memory, to correct the judgment, to restrain the passions, to instil and strengthen the virtuous resolve, and to discipline the child, yet immature, for the pur-

suits and duties of the man. Ye are infants yourselves, yet to come of age in immortality. What discipline do you exercise over your own hearts? what education are you getting for eternity? Oh, infatuated as you are, you are training your children, but you are neglecting yourselves. It will be a terrible thing if the "Books that are opened" against you in the Day of Judgment should be the very school-books which you have furnished to your children; if the training of them should draw down the sternest condemnation upon you; if the Judge should say, "They have admitted that preparedness is necessary; they acted on that admission in their treatment of their offspring, but they have forgotten it in their treatment of themselves: take ye the unprofitable servants, and send them down to the prison and the fire."

You will observe that the Apostle, speaking of the meetness of the Colossian church, refers it explicitly to the operation of Divine agency: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The same affirmation will be found in other parts of Scripture: "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of his Spirit." "It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." If we bear fruit at all, "in him is our fruit found." If we are trees, we are the "branch of his planting, the work of his hands, that he may be glorified." The wicked treasure up *unto themselves* wrath against the day of wrath. They have taken the matter, so to speak, out of God's hands. They prefer pleading their own cause, and will not

trust it in the hands of "an Advocate and Mediator;" but the righteous work out their salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in them to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Reason confesses our need, but cannot solve the problem of our remedy, or master the difficulties of our condition. All the appliances of human wisdom only gloss over the deformity and hide the corruption of our moral death. God alone can breathe life into the clay, and it becomes a living soul.

You will observe, further, that the working of this meetness is placed by the Apostle in the catalogue of past things, "which *hath* made us meet." We are accustomed to think of the preparation for heaven as a gradual work, and undoubtedly there is a growth in holiness and love in the believing soul, by which it may rise to loftier attainment in the kingdom; but since the Apostle speaks of it as already done, we should seem to refer it rather to the justifying grace of God than to the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. It would appear that as soon as a man's sins are forgiven, he is made meet for the inheritance. We are the more confirmed in this view, from the fact of its being the *Father* to whom the meetness is ascribed. There seems to be a reference here to the act of our adoption; the Spirit sent of God to witness to the fact of our adoption working in that same instant the regeneration of our nature—that high and marvellous transformation, by which we are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. We need but to be converted to God to have the meetness as well as the title for heaven. By conversion the man's tastes are changed. Sin,

formerly loved, is hated with intensest loathing. Holiness is followed after. God becomes the object of desire ; and Christ, who to the unrenewed had no form nor comeliness, is seen in his transcendent beauty the "altogether lovely." A pardoned man, dying with his sins forgiven, cannot be shut out of heaven ; a pardoned man, dying pardoned, must therefore have a meetness for heaven. We say not a word in this statement against the worth and necessity of sanctification. Growth is an evidence of life ; and if the man increases not in all holiness, the presumption is that he has neither title nor meetness for heaven ; but just as the infant newly born has within him all the organs and senses which adapt him for a residence on earth, though feeble and undeveloped, needing constant watchfulness and careful training—so the justified man, by the reversal of the curse and the renewal of the nature, is possessed of all the elements of which the kingdom of heaven is essentially composed. The glories of heaven, though seen in partial eclipse, and through a glass, darkly, are visible to his eye ; the laws of heaven have obtained, though not yet in undisputed ascendancy, the empire of his heart ; the character of heaven, with some spots yet marring its lustre, shines forth in the practice of his life ; he has fixed his eyes on Jesus, and by inevitable assimilation he is transformed into likeness as he gazes ; every day he is shaped and moulded for eternity ; he grows in grace as he walks through the twilight of advancing years ; the grey hues steal silently on, and by and by, in the mellow eventide,

" Mortals cry, A man is dead !
Angels sing, A child is born ! "

And the vesper hymn of that sad yet glorious eventide, chanted by surviving friends—and they can sing it through their tears—is just the utterance of our text : “ Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made him meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.”

We cannot forbear again, and more expressly, to remind you that it is the Father who thus quickens and prepares his children. In most other parts of Scripture, the work of preparation for heaven is said to be the work of the Spirit, so that the text seems to be a deviation from the usage of inspired expression—and why, but that the thought might be presented in overwhelming tenderness and power. It is the Father ; not a repulsive stranger, who chills our spirits by his stoicism, and repels our questions by his frown. It is the Father ; not a harsh schoolmaster, who has forgotten in the habits of the pedagogue the feelings of the man, whose countenance darkens when our dulness is bewildered or our waywardness rebels, but who relaxes into no smile of complacency when we have mastered some difficult self-problem, or achieved a conquest over some giant sin. It is the Father ; not even a kind angel, full of benevolent ministration and of tender heart, but lacking knowledge of our frailty and sympathy with our struggles. It is the Father, of amplest experience and all-embracing sympathies ; the Father, whose justice so often lingers into love, yearning when he smites, and weeping when he chastens ; the Father, who “ pitieth ” his children, for he “ knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust,” who has promised that “ he will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever ;” the

Father, who, on the first symptom of declension from obedience, throws his affection into an upbraiding glance, and pursues the wayward ones with the kind reproach, "Will ye also go away?" the Father, who hails the indications of returning sanity, brings for the ragged and famine-stricken prodigal the best robe and the daintiest fare, and, amid harpings and gladness, clasps the wanderer to his home and to his heart; the Father, who moans even over audacious rebellion—"O Ephraim, how shall I give thee up?" It is *the Father* "which hath made us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Oh, with what fidelity and yet with what affection does he school his children!

Brethren, look into your own experience, and behold how he has led you, "in a way that you knew not," "into a wealthy place." Perhaps the world had prospered you, and you were planning some comfortable retirement for the remainder of your days; and God saw that you were increased in goods, and that there was a disposition within you to say, "I shall never be moved, I shall never be in adversity." Then like a scared eagle your gathered wealth flew at one fell swoop away, and a pang shot through you as you lost it; but it taught you a wholesome lesson, and because of that reverse of fortune, you stand before the world and before the church a wiser and a holier man. Perhaps hidden weakness was developed in your mortal frame, just when you were laying out your strength in extended usefulness for God, and you felt the restraint and the sickness hard to bear. Ah! but in that cloudy weather, in that brown and mellow autumn of your life, there was a wealthier

growth, a faster ripening, a richer fruitage wrought in your spirit than you knew when, rioting in health, you sported in the bright and sunny June. You were of a passive, leaning, indecisive tendency, deciding only by the counsel of others, doing but at their prompting or will; and your parents were so wise and kind that you reposed under their shadow, or leaned upon them as upon the staff of your pilgrimage. But this would never do. You must be thrown upon your own resources, or trained to trust in God; and so the staff broke from under you, the shadow grew fainter and fainter until at last there was another shadow in its place, even the shadow of death; and thus compelled to self-reliance, you found you could walk alone, and with manly step you went out into the earnest world. Or, perhaps, you loved the good opinion of your fellows, and your desire to please was so inordinate, that you were in danger of becoming a traitor to your better self; you dared hardly do a good, lest it should be evil spoken of, or maintain a truth, lest it should entail obloquy, or avow a faith, lest the scoffer should frown; and God cast you upon evil days and evil tongues; you heard the slander of many, you were denounced with every adjective of opprobrium as an oppressor or a hypocrite; forgetful of the amenities of society, men said all manner of evil against you falsely; and you survived it all, and you wondered to feel how little difference it made. There were springs of enjoyment yet open to you. Nature was not affected by the reproaches of men. The sun shone as kindly on you as of yore. The zephyr fanned your brow with as gentle a wing; brothers born for

adversity trooped up with their welcome sustaining ; and, better still, the brave conscience bore you up, and the light of God's countenance flashed bright and broad upon your soul, and ever since that time you have had a holier courage : yours has been the poet's language—

“ Ten thousand deaths in every nerve
I'd rather suffer than deserve.”

You have felt that a solitary smile of God repays the damage of a hundred slanderous tongues ; and you have gone forward with the firm determination that it is better to die doing right, than ignobly to live doing wrong. Or finally, perhaps your family grew up around you, and bloomed in beauty or excelled in strength ; there was intellect in the mind and affection in the heart, and you felt that with all these ties to earth—friends, competence, imagination, usefulness, honour, means of grace, devout and congenial society—it were difficult to die ; and God snapped the ties asunder. Your usefulness was hindered by infirmity. The blossoms fell from the tree. Generous youth was taken in its promise to bloom in a kindlier clime. One by one the links of the chain were loosened. You stand alone amid the wreckage of the past. The heart mourned its dead. Earth seems poor to it. It turns longingly to the “ wealthy heaven that holds the new-born angels in its light,” and from you, who felt awhile ago as if you could not die, there breathes the prayer, “ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.” Is it not so, brethren ? Oh, blessed thought ! Your times are in his hand. You are waiting for the coming of the Lord. With

this meetness for the inheritance, the gift of the Father to his child, go into prosperity—it will not inflate you; go into adversity—it will not depress you; lie down calmly on the couch of death—you shall neither be uncomforted nor alone. And then what remains but to triumph in the parting agony; to enter, with this completed meetness, into heaven; and to hear the funeral sounds of this stricken and dying world change suddenly into a marriage-peal of bells, chiming at the coming of the Highest, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, and the Bride hath made herself ready.”

XXIX.

THE VISION OF THE WATERS.

“And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live : and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither : for they shall be healed ; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.”—EZEK. xlvii. 9.

I HAVE somewhere seen a picture, which, in a few brief words, and from dim memories only, I will endeavour to describe to you. The scene is in the far East ; the hour just when the earth is lighted up with the glory of that rare oriental sunrise which we westerns long to see ; the time, the sultry August, when the fierce sun has it all his own way, and the country seems to have a sickly cast upon it, as if it fainted beneath the intenseness of the glare ; the plain is scorched and arid, and the river, prisoned between its banks, halts for very weariness, and seems scarcely to have strength enough to propel its sluggish stream. There, on an eminence, by a group of ancestral palms, stands a knot of Egyptian peasants, swarthy and muscular, talking wildly to each other, and with eyes all strained in the direction of the south, in which quarter there seems to gather an indescribable haze, the forecasting shadow of some atmospheric or other change. Why wait they so eagerly ? Why is their gaze so wist-

fully fastened just where the river faintly glimmers on the horizon's dusky verge? Oh, they are conscious, from the experience of years, that the time has come for the inundation of the Nile! They may not know by what secret process the waters are gathered, that in the distant Abyssinia the materials for the tribute are distilled; but as certainly as if their knowledge was profound and scientific, they calculate upon the coming of the flood. And they know, too, that when the flood does come, that scorched plain will by and by wave with ripening grain, and there shall be corn in Egypt, and those blackened pastures shall be gay with such a fertile plenty that the whole land shall eat and shall be satisfied, "for every thing shall live whither the river cometh;" and so marvellous shall be the transformation that the Turkish description of the Egyptian climate shall stand good—that "for three months the land is white as pearl, for three months black like musk, for three months green like emerald, for three months yellow like gold." This has struck me as a very graphic representation of Ezekiel's vision, embodied in the experience of Eastern life. Nothing can better image the moral barrenness of this world—a wilderness of sin—than the plains upon which the consuming heat has lighted, and, withering the green herb, has induced the dread of famine. Nothing can better set forth the life and healing of the Gospel of Christ than the flow of the life-giving river. Nothing can better show the attitude befitting all earnest Christian men, than the wistful gaze of the peasants to the place whence the deliverance was to come, that they might catch the first murmur of the quickened

waters, and be ready to communicate the joy. There is, of course, a spiritual application of the vision, and that spiritual application is in the gospel of Christ, made effectual by the Holy Ghost for the healing and salvation of men. You will not fail to remember how often this gospel is set forth by the inspired writers under this same figure. Under the similitude of living water, its blessings were promised to the Samaritan woman. The Divine stranger, who lifted up his voice on the last day of the feast, announced that the heart of each believer should be a fountain of living water; and, in identity of vision between the seer of the Old Testament and the evangelist of the New, John was shown the "river of the water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." We do not err, therefore, in taking the holy waters to be the emblems of that wondrous scheme of mercy—perfected by the atonement of Christ, made vital by the ever-present Spirit, and adapted to the salvation of the world.

In this view, *the source, the progress, and the efficacy* of the holy waters may each claim a brief notice at our hands.

I. There is said to have been a very copious fountain on the west side of Jerusalem. At this fountain, which was called Gihon, Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet stood by the youthful Solomon, and with many holy solemnities proclaimed him king. The prudent Hezekiah, foreseeing that, in a time of siege, an enemy might cut off its streams, conducted them by a secret aqueduct into the city; and David, deriving from this fountain one of his choicest emblems of

spiritual blessing, struck his harp and sang—"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God." It may be, that there may have been some subtle connection of thought between this fountain and the vision which floated before the senses of Ezekiel, as there was a stream from this same fountain into the temple, and from the foundations of the holy house the holy waters sprang. Be this as it may, the truth is significantly told, that while through the temple come to us the tidings of our peace, the blessing itself does not originate there, but is conveyed to it from a source invisible and afar.

In God's great provision for the restoration of the fallen race, there are both instrumental and efficient agencies. He has appointed means, and a Divine and perpetual resident to infuse those means with life. Although there is no innate power in means, as God's appointed channel of communication, they are not to be despised. There is not now, as in the Jewish dispensation, a central spot where all the solemnities are held, and where religion treasures up her most precious and hallowed memorials; the prestige and sacredness of the ancient Jerusalem have passed away; but God's presence is yet in his sanctuaries in peculiar manifestation, and there are special promises of favour for those that wait for him and that call upon his name. They deprive themselves of a large inheritance of blessing, and are deeply criminal withal, who forsake the assembling of themselves together in the place where the ordinance of preaching is established, where the sacraments are duly administered, and where prayer is wont to be made. The ordinances of religion may

be, and very often are, observed only with external decorum ; the song may be a formal burst, the prayer a lip service, the whole a Sabbath compromise with conscience for a week's indulgence in sin ; but to the true-hearted and the contrite it is from the temple that the healing waters flow. The heart, ignorant of God, and of its own duty, dimly conscious that the reconciliation for which it pants has been achieved by the merits of another, hears of him in the temple, and is glad. The contrite one, loathing all his former practices of foolishness, bows tearfully in the temple as he says, "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight." "But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy : and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple." Here, as in a spiritual laver-sea, the soul of the polluted receives the cleansing of the water and the Word : the poor children of sorrow smile through their tears as they are satisfied with the goodness of his house : the lame halts no longer as he emerges from this Bethesda of the paralyzed, whose waters have been stirred from on high. It is from between the cherubims that God specially shines, and among the golden candlesticks that he walks to bless his people. Here, as in a well-furnished hall of banquet, believers "eat of the fatness of his house, and drink of the river of his pleasures ;" and in the temple are at once the highest teaching, the most satisfying comfort, the closest fellowship with God, and the amplest preparation for heaven.

Brethren, your presence here proves that the way to the temple is a familiar road to you. Do you love its courts ? Are they to you as homes of endearment

and blessing? "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." Ask yourselves whether your desire is to be like his? or like his servant's, the royal Psalmist, that you may *dwell* in the house of the Lord—as the oracle where your inquiring mind may learn the Saviour's will, as the shrine where your enamoured heart may behold his perfection of beauty? They who love the river of the temple are the likeliest, walking on its banks, to find its source issuing from the throne. While we thus appreciate the uses of the temple as an instrumentality of blessing, and rejoice in the waters as they flow, we must remember always that they issue from the *foundation* of the house, and have their springs in the everlasting hills; in other words, that God is the one source of life, and that means, unless he vitalize them, are but the "letter that killeth," "the shadow of good things to come." You are sufficiently instructed in the things of God to know that God has confided the great scheme of human redemption to no agency less powerful than his own. While the atheist cannot find a God, and the deist is deaf to his revelation, and the pantheist reduces him to an abstraction, the heart of Christianity leaps within her as she exults to believe that all round her is God—living, personal, omnipotent, gracious God. It is one of the glorious beliefs, which fence round our own individual faith as with a rampart of impregnable strength that ever since the revelation of Christianity, this poor stricken world has "not many days" been orphaned of a present God. In the olden time God spake in symbol, in vision, in thunder, in fire; though even amid

the comparative dimness of the Mosaic economy, the eternal Son, as if impatient that his work of redemption should commence, previsited the scenes of his incarnation, and took the form of an angel, while yet the fulness of time was not come for him to assume the form of a man. In the days of his flesh he perfected the work by one offering for ever, gave the world its sublimest morality and its most spotless example, a vanquishing of death by death, and a proof of victory by the resurrection from the grave; and then, having provided the instruments of propagation, and promised the agent, he ascended up on high. Through the interval, dreary and trying to the expectant twelve, though "not many days" according to the calendar, "the promise of the Father" bridged the chasm between the ascent of the Son and the descent of the Spirit. It was a solemn hush, like the silence which runs along a line of battle between the hoarse word of command and the fierce onset on the foe. The Saviour had said upon the cross, "It is finished"—and, as a token that it was finished—a token beyond all gainsaying—he caught up the thief by his side, and made him the first-fruits of the Pentecost. Then, after his resurrection he sent forth his disciples on their mission, and his language was—"Go, but tarry;" don't march undisciplined, and without a leader; wait until, like the mysterious stranger who presented himself before the face of Gideon, the captain of the host of the Lord shall come; "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." And suddenly and richly that "promise of the Father" came; and the fire, which

sat upon the heads of the anointed ones in that upper room, was kindled by their instrumentality in many hearts in Jerusalem, spread into other regions, and has gone burning on till now.

Oh, do you not see the fulness and riches of the provision! The scheme is too mighty to be divinely forsaken; the issues involved in it are too vast; the results of failure will be so appalling, that no man is equal to the task. It is beyond even angelic power; it can be trusted only in the hands of the Divine. God the eternal Son ascends, but the world is not orphaned of the Divine, for God the Holy Ghost comes down.

Brethren, though the Saviour has ascended up on high, he has shed forth his Spirit. That Spirit lives on earth, the perpetuator of the gospel impression, the inspirer of all thought that is holy, the great and living agent in the conversion of mankind. Oh, comforting truth! We believe in the Holy Ghost! What else would assure our confidence amid the insolence of error and the haughtiness of scorn, amid the craft of demon hate, hostile confederacies of evil, the audacious wickedness of our own hearts, earth's fickle peoples, and earth's banded kings? What else would fortify our trust in a Word, which has within itself every element of opposition to ungodliness, but no element of triumph over sin? "It is the spirit which quickeneth." Men say the truth is power, but it is not, *alone*. It is feeble as the pliant osier or the bruised reed against the malignant enmity of evil. But let the Spirit animate it, and it shall overcome all hostility, and be brave and mighty to prevail.

My brethren, the Spirit is in the Word we preach

to-day, and he has promised to apply it. Let us honour him by asking for his grace. Prayer will be a profitless litany, praise a foolish cymbal-song, our life of devotion abortive, our every sanctuary service a worthless trouble, unless he grant us his blessing. We shall still dishonour God, and be greedy after evil, and follow on the trail of the serpent, and fall into the recompense of doom, unless the Spirit be given to us from on high. But the prayer of the stammerer will be eloquent, the most tuneless strain a doxology, the meanest effort an acceptable sacrifice, if he inspire them. The darkness of the ignorant shall be enlightened, and the distress of the contrite soothed, and the way of the perplexed straightened, and the wound of the apostate healed, and visions of brightness break upon the dulled senses of the dying, if only the divine Spirit, God the Holy Ghost, be there.

II. Notice *the progress* of these waters, thus flowing from the foundations of the temple.

You observe that in the context the progress of these waters is said to have been *gradual* and *constant*. The prophet saw them first reaching to the ankles, then to the knees, then to the loins, and then they became a river too deep to be forded, even a river to swim in. There was no ceasing in the flow, there was no ebbing of the waters; they flowed gradually and constantly in an ever deepening stream. And this is only a description of the progress of the gospel of Christ. Small and feeble in its beginnings—those trembling but earnest fishermen, its earliest preachers—with wealth and rank and patronage and

power all arrayed against its progress—with Cæsars conspiring to strangle it, and armies marched out against its fugitive sons—how marvellous was its triumph! Only think of the rapidity with which it spread. Jerusalem was filled with the doctrine; Antioch, Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Athens, Rome, all trembled before its denunciations of their vices, and admitted its transforming leaven within a century of its Founder's death. "We were but of yesterday," says one of the early apologists of the new faith, "and we have filled your cities, islands, towns, and boroughs, the camp, the senate, and the forum." Writers of the second century speak of the whole world of the Roman empire being filled with the doctrine of Christ. Constantine emblazoned the cross on his banners, and throned Christianity as the religion of the State; and at the close of the third century, when Julian gasped out his celebrated dying words, it was not the apostate only, but the world, which the Galilean had overcome. And though after the establishment of Christianity there was a seeming eclipse of faith, and corruptions blemished the comeliness of the bride of Christ, the gradual progress among the nations did not cease. One after another they received her teachings and submitted to her sway. Insensibly she moulded the institutions of society, and stamped upon them her own image. Sanguinary codes were relaxed; unholy traffic terminated; cruelty had her arm paralyzed and her sword blunted; fraud and lust and drunkenness became no longer things of glorying, but of shame; there was a gradual uplifting in the moral health, as if there flowed around the people the bracing air-

waves of a purer atmosphere; and men wondered whence the healing came.

The river had done it all : flowing on, now through the darkling brake, and now over the open plain ; now fertilizing the swards upon its banks ; now rejoicing in the depth of its own channel—imperceptible almost in the increasing volume of its waters to those who continually beheld it, and yet, to those who gazed only at intervals, seen to have both widened and deepened every day.

And it is rolling on still. Perhaps there never was an age of such quickened religious activity as the one in which we are privileged to live. Here, and there, and yonder, we hear of the cloud rising, hanging, bursting over this and that hill of Zion in plentiful showers of blessing. Churches, which for years have been languid, have been roused into a warmth of life which has astonished them, and have felt, in their new freedom, as if the death-frost, which had been for so long benumbing their energies, had just been unchained. The heart of old formalities has been smitten like the rock at Horeb, and the waters have leaped forth into the wilderness. Many have run to and fro, inflamed with a high zeal for God and souls. The sounds of earth's only joyous wailing—the wailing of penitent sinners—which loud hosannas follow, have been heard in many sanctuaries and from many hearts. Ministers, whose disheartened labours had toiled only upon the rock, have brought their sheaves with a reaper's bursting gladness, and everything has been renewed as if the moral summer of the world were coming. And what is it all but the murmur of this ancient river—

still flowing by our homesteads, its waters sparkling in the healing sun—and the melody of the daughters of music on its banks making glad the city of our God?

There are two thoughts suggested by this gradual and constant progress of the Gospel. The first encourages our faith; the second reminds us of our responsibility. If we believe, with all the firmness of a settled conviction, that the gospel is of God, we may rest in the assurance that it must and will prevail; and this hearty faith in its triumphant destiny will save us from the extremes of feeling—from undue elation in seasons of unusual promise, and from unusual depression in seasons of peculiar languor. Opposition may seem to crumble like a mountain of ice, or it may frown in stern defiance from an unbreached and cannon-mounted wall. Public opinion, changeful ever, may applaud the heroism of the Church, or sneer at its enthusiasm. Legislation may benefit or brand godliness: it has done both with equal heartiness and facility. The choicest of the Church's youth may press into her ministry, with a holy emulation to be baptized for the dead; or they may leave its ranks to be recruited from the class of zealous poverty, themselves preferring opulence or lettered ease. The spirit of revival may spread like a beacon-blaze from hill to hill, until the flame that was ready to die may be rekindled upon a thousand altars; or it may be thwarted by indifference, or marred by the excesses of fanaticism. Veterans may be spared to marshal and counsel, with hearts as buoyant as in youth, and eyes like Moses', which the lapse of years

has tried in vain to dim ; or the princes and the great men may fall in quick succession out of Israel. But the Gospel goes on through all vicissitude to win its widening way. *It* is never languid, though its advocates fail. It marches with the ages ; or rather, they wonder to find, in all their progress, its exquisite adaptation. It loses no fitness for man, though he has cast off the habits of his ancestors ; and feudal shames and hoary wrongs are left in troops behind. All things else succumb to the great law of development, and become flexible, if they mean to live. It alone needs no improvement ; no doctrine is antiquated, no fact is shrivelled. It is as calm in its kingly conquest over modern as over ancient error. There is no decrepitude about it—

“ Time writes no wrinkle on its azure brow.”

Brethren, you may trust the Gospel to accomplish its Maker's design. It is God's great agency, made vital by his own indwelling—never to be amended, never to be suspended. Christ has sent it forth as the word out of his mouth, to accomplish that which he pleases ; and, in regal hope, he sits “ expecting ” until its work is done.

The other thought addresses itself solemnly to ourselves. It is quite impossible for us to live in times like ours, when not only the ordinary religious privileges exist and are enjoyed, but when there is so much of special unction with the Word, and such large and manifest workings of the Holy Ghost, without entailing an added amount of *responsibility*. We are the “ Chorazins and Bethsaidas ” of the present ; for in

our sight have many of these mighty works been done. If there be any successor to Capernaum, it is surely Britain, which by its advantages is "exalted to heaven." How have we improved them? It is a question which presses upon us all. Are we holier? nearer to God? transformed into a heavenlier likeness? filled with a more hallowed and absorbing desire? or have we been indifferent, or scornful, and, in marvellous insensibility to impression, do we remain, like Gideon's fleece—

" Unwatered still and dry,
While the dew on all around
Falls plenteous from the sky " ?

Let us examine ourselves in God's presence to-day. Beware of attributing the Holy Spirit's work to evil agency. That is marvellously like the sin that hath never forgiveness. Beware of setting yourselves in an attitude of resistance to good influences. The waters *wear* the stones, but do not change their nature. Beware of delaying yourselves into hardness of heart. The waters petrify sometimes, and there are some moral petrifications, alas! which cannot be broken even by "the hammer of the Word."

III. We are to notice *the efficacy* of these waters.

It has been impossible ever and anon to avoid allusion to their healing nature, as we have passed along. It is the less necessary, therefore, to enlarge at any length upon their efficacy as a specific head of discourse. The places to which the waters flowed are striking. They did not wend their course to spots that were only slightly defective, and easily healed.

They did not impart partial and temporary life under very favourable circumstances. They flowed "into the desert and into the sea"—"into the desert," amidst whose endless sands no streams had flowed before; "into the sea," the Dead Sea, in whose sad and sluggish waters nothing which had breath could live. Thus their mission was both to supply that which was lacking, and to cleanse that which was impure.

How complete and how effectual the healing! "Every thing shall live whither the river cometh." And this is true of the Gospel of Christ. There is no desert of worldliness which the Gospel cannot turn into a garden; there is no Dead Sea of error which the Gospel cannot purge of its pollution, and change into a receptacle of life. The completeness of this work of healing is one of its most remarkable characteristics, and furnishes to those who rejoice in it their highest materials of praise. Though the world is as a vast valley of the dead, without motion, or strength, or hope, there is not one of its unburied corpses which may not by the Gospel be quickened into life. "*Every* thing shall live whither the river cometh." Oh, I am firm in the belief, and bold in the proclamation of this glorious truth, that by the Gospel there is life for all. Its voice can reach to the very farthest wards of the sepulchre; no catacomb is too remote, or too crowded, or too loathsome to be visited and emptied. However long the death may have continued, the Gospel can chase it from the heart. "*Every* thing shall live whither the river cometh." Not only can it reach every man, but each part of every man. Life for the understanding, that it may no longer be smitten by

error—life for the imagination, that its strange fires may be quenched, and a purer flame be kindled in their stead—life for the memory, that it may no longer be haunted by the wraiths of ghostly sins—life for the affections, that they may revel in a pure attachment which is *not* idolatry, ever increasing and yet ever satisfied—life for the whole nature, that it may not be “dead in trespasses and sins”—life for the destiny, that it may not even be sullied by the shadow of death, but exult in an ever-brightening inheritance through an eternal day. “*Every* thing shall live.”

It shall flow into the *desert*; and love to God shall be implanted where was formerly enmity, and the whole nature shall be turned about to serve him. Yea, such shall be the wondrous change, that “instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” It shall flow into the *sea*; and though the proud waves shall resist its entrance, it shall overcome their frantic waters and heal them of their plague. Some of you may have seen, as I have, a very fine illustration of this, so far as earthly things can illustrate heavenly, in nature’s bounteous kingdom. I stood last summer, at the point of confluence, near the fair city of Geneva, where two great rivers meet, but do not mingle. Here the Rhone, “the arrowy Rhone,” rapid and beautiful, pours on its waters of that heavenly blue which it is almost worth a pilgrimage to see; there the Arve, turbid and muddy—partly from the glaciers from which it is so largely fed, and partly from the clayey soil which it upheaves in its

impetuous path—brawls hoarsely in its passionate course; and for a long distance beyond the point of junction they roll side by side, with no barrier between them but their own innate repulsions, each making now and then an encroachment upon the other, but beaten back again into its own domain. Like mighty rival forces of good and evil do they seem, and for a long time the issue is doubtful. But far down the long valley, if you look again, you find that the frantic Arve is mastered, and the Rhone has coloured the entire surface of the stream with its own emblematic and beautiful blue. I thought, as I gazed upon it, that it symbolized the long-protracted conflict between truth and error; but in meditating upon the flowing of these healing waters, and reading that they shall flow into the sea and heal it, the vision of the scene rose up before me, fresh and vivid as the facts of yesterday. And as my own view of the passage was rendered clearer, and my own faith strengthened by the aptness of the illustration, I would fain, by this simple picture, impart something of the same blessedness to you.

With a glad heart I do believe and preach that there is no ailment, nor leprosy, nor death that is beyond the power of the Gospel, made vital and energetic by the Spirit of God. "Everything"—oh, they are glad tidings for the polluted and the sinful—"shall live whither the river cometh."

Are you living?

"But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt." (Ver. 11.)

XXX.

LARGENESS OF HEART.

“And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore.”
—1 KINGS iv. 29.

ONCE, in the olden time, a great painter on his travels entered the studio of another, whose name had been mentioned with his own in honourable rivalry. As his brother in the art was absent, the attendants inquired the visitor's name. His only answer was a rapid stroke upon the canvas which lay stretched out upon the easel. When the artist returned, and was shown the significant symbol, he broke out into the glad recognition, “It is Apelles of Cos”; for the genius of the master shone out from the hasty cartoon.

Theirs were graphic pencils who painted the characters of the Bible. There is no laboured elaboration, nor artistic finish in their pictures; but in a few bold and rapid strokes, dashed off in the course of a continuous narrative, they give the lifelike portrait of a man. Severe in their simplicity, accurate in their delineation, and artless in their candour, they are so utterly unlike all human productions, that we are led

to believe that the skill to portray thus vividly must be a divine endowment; and from the biography, we might argue the inspiration of the Bible.

The glimpses which are given us of the inner life and character of Solomon are full of interest and full of instruction. As, one by one, are unfolded to us his fluctuations, the various changes of his many-sided life, we seem to be gazing upon an exhibition of dissolving views, in which are represented all possible varieties of condition and experience. We see him first in his generous youth, when the Lord loved him, bending down to receive his father's blessing, and treasuring his dying words as a heritage of inestimable wisdom. Then, in the visions of the night, he communes with unearthly visitants, and, preferring the gift of understanding, long life and riches are promised also as the reward of his discerning choice. Again, we behold him on the throne, astonishing the clients at his judgment-seat by the sagacity of his decision—imperial in heart and in dominion—his greatness transcending rumour—foreign potentates, gorgeous in their own territories, abashed before the unheard-of magnificence of Solomon in all his glory. We look again; and we see him in his highest elevation, at the dedication of the temple—a royal priest for his people, uplifting the entreaty and dispensing the blessing, with his majestic form radiant with the glory of the Divine presence-cloud. We look again; and, alas! the fine gold has become dim; the king sweeps forth in his chariot royally as of old, but his countenance has the flush, not of health, but of intemperance; the red spot of anger gathers often on his brow. The

welkin rings not, as formerly, with the plaudits of an acclaiming people; there are looks of discontent and murmurs of tyranny; licentiousness holds its revel in the once orderly court; and Chemosh, and Ashtaroth, and Milcom, and other rabble divinities, have all their service and their shrine. As we mourn over this dark cloud, which has gathered upon a life once sunny as the morning, the shadows lighten somewhat; and, in the twilight of reflective age, we see the monarch, a sadder and a wiser man, trying to wring out of the brain which indulgence has enfeebled, some fragments of his former wisdom, that he might write upon the world the verdict of vanity, and impress upon mankind "the conclusion of the whole matter"—that to "fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man." It is a wondrous history; happy are those who profit by it, and who learn its lessons of salutary warning!

It is our purpose at present to dwell upon one of the bestowments which God gave to Solomon, and which we are wishful should be conferred upon ourselves. On the wisdom and understanding we do not intend to dwell; our business is with the "largeness of heart," and we will notice—

- I. *What is comprehended in "largeness of heart."*
- II. *How it may be obtained.*
- III. *What makes it valuable.*

I. By the term "heart" in the text, we are to understand the entire man, the whole round of the intellectual and moral powers; and the gift of "largeness of heart" seems to import that he had conferred

on him a breadth of view, of feeling, and of sympathy adapted to the circumstances in which he was placed. "Largeness of heart," in a spiritual and evangelical sense, has an analogous meaning; it is, in fact, that "*that* mind may be in us which was also in Christ Jesus." The term occurs in several other passages of Scripture, with remarkable unanimity of import. When the prophet Isaiah, for example, is depicting the increase of the church, and its accession of joy after long years of wasting and of sorrow, he says, "Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee." When the apostle would express the intensity of his affection for the Corinthian church, and his solicitude for their stedfastness and growth, he breaks out into the apostrophe, "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged." And the royal Psalmist, expressing his longings after fuller conformity to God's image and richer experience of his grace, says, "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."

This heart will be—1. *Well furnished.*

It is perfectly impossible to conceive of "largeness of heart" without increasing progress in the acquisition of knowledge. We see this constantly illustrated in the affairs of ordinary life. Our first ideas of things are taken upon trust. We are credulous, and believe everything we hear. There is a sort of Saturn's ring girding the whole orb of ancestral sentiments and practices, which we are very unwilling

to disturb. Hence in so many cases the opinions are entailed with the estates, and are heirlooms as reverently prized. No awkward inquiries perplex us, we are haunted by no misgivings, and we repose in a kind of dreamy infallibility upon the notions which we have traditionally imbibed. But intercourse with the world soon robs us of our boasted wisdom. Out in the midst of life—in the broad arena where minds meet and grapple, where rival thoughts, brought into contact, flash like a stricken flint, and the world is the better for the fire—our cherished ideas are jostled so often and so rudely, that we lose all faith in them, and are ready in our bewilderment to pass in headlong transition from the extreme of credulity to the extreme of unbelief. When we recover our balance, we find out that while it were foolish to shut our eyes when there streams around us the light of advancing discovery, that light burnishes into newer brightness many of our long-loved principles; so that the wisdom of our ancestors was not all folly, and we are ready to smile both at the assurance and at the scepticism of both phases of our former selves. Then it is that we subside into that golden mean, which approximates to the perfectness of mental moods—the calm adjustment between veneration and independence, the inquisitiveness which would “prove all things,” along with the inflexible will that would “hold fast that which is good.” Hence the men of large hearts—the men who march in the van, the leaders, not the laggards, in the onward movements of the time—are the well-furnished men read in the lore of books, disciplined in the school of experience, enlarged by the

enlightenment of travel—the men who with persevering impartiality have sat at the feet of all teachers whose lips have imparted knowledge.

And *evangelical* large-heartedness, with which we have just now especially to do, is in like manner comprehensiveness of knowledge. "Ignorance is" not, and never can be, "the mother of devotion." It may be the mother of gorgeous observance and fantastic mummary, such as form so large a portion of the worship of the Church which has forged the axiom; but devotion depends upon conditions, and requires a state of feeling which cannot possibly subsist in the absence of knowledge. All the inspired writers, as with one voice, proclaim the necessity of knowledge for growth and increase in piety. Hence it is recorded, "Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation." Peter, whose very impetuosity would make him more alive to the danger of superficial piety, exhorts, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Paul, with true discrimination, warns believers against allowing their love to be an unintelligent emotion: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." John, who ought surely to understand the mind of Christ, as he leaned upon the bosom, and listened to the beating of the Master's heart, and learned to regulate by it the pulses of his own, says, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true." Christ himself, as he tramples upon the world's olden darkness—and superstitions, venerable for age, cower

out of sight as he appears—announces, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.”

Brethren, there is a sad lack of this characteristic of “largeness of heart” amongst us. One great cause of the numerous instances of defective profession over which our churches mourn—why so many who once ran well have fallen into the turbulence of the designing, or into the error of the wicked—has been that the excitements of holy feeling have not been supplemented by the consolidation of principle; that the emotional nature has been unduly exercised, while the strength of intellectual belief has been suffered to become enfeebled, and die. In these days of subtilty and of danger, there should be no pious peasant “who knows, and *knows no more*, his Bible true.” That fascinating vision, which at once fed the romance and inflamed the devotion of our fathers, should have no existence amidst the realities of this our work-day world. Scoffers should no longer be able to curl the lip and toss the disdainful glance, as they recount the weaknesses and blunders of the faithful. Apostles should no longer have to say—half in admiration of their enthusiasm, and half in reprobation of their errors—“I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” Men, common men, of ordinary intelligence, wielding the plane or driving the hammer, plying the shuttle or following the plough, should be able “to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in” them. Not that the ark is in danger, but it must have Levites of a higher grade in its service. Not that

the fervour of faith should be restrained, but that there should be added to it sanctions of highest authentication, and principles of unbending strength. Gather this heavenly knowledge, and your hearts will enlarge in the process ; and as, from the crest of the Pisgah to which your faith had climbed, you view the good land beneath and the radiant sky above you, your hearts, well furnished with the evidences of the reality of the prospect and of your own interest in the blessedness, will feel a rapture all their own, as you "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" your Lord.

2. It is *magnanimous*.

It is said of Cardinal Wolsey, that in the days of his luxury, when he was surrounded by a host of servile followers, who dropped away from him at the first rumours of his fall, he was accustomed, in the fulness of his heart, to say, "*Ego et rex meus*"—"I and my king"—setting himself, in his vain imaginings, above the patron whose favour had uplifted him ; and it is recorded of one of the kings of France, that so supremely did he regard his own interest, it was his habit to say, "France, that is, myself." And on a smaller scale, and on matters less influential, this is but a fair representation of the experience of the mass of mankind. Self is made the great central luminary around which other men, like satellites, revolve ! Objects are viewed from a selfish standpoint, and are prosecuted with selfish aims. To regale self, to aggrandize self, to pleasure self, to pander to self—these make up the life-work of so many of us, that we almost persuade ourselves that disinterestedness

is a thing only of the lexicon; and that selfishness, like a moral maelstrom, absorbs each nobler feeling, and then, insatiate, turns upon itself, and sucks its own heart away. In the world around us we see the baneful results of this dominancy of an evil principle. Some large hearts have started projects of philanthropy, or conceived plans of social or moral improvement. They have sought help from their fellows, and some, from various motives, have afforded them support, so that they have rejoiced in the promise of flourishing and blessed enterprise; but in the working has come selfishness, like the dead fly in the ointment, and has given an ill savour to it all. Weak men have intruded their partialities, and narrow men have cherished their prejudices, and ambitious men must make offerings to their vanity, and proud men must have their consequence appeased, and ill-tempered men must let off their petulance, until the good has been evil spoken of, and the blessing restrained; and the observant world, contrasting the large promise and the scanty result, has said advisedly what David said in haste, "All men are liars." And in the sphere of morals, and in connection with the Church of God, it is marvellous how the depraved will, intent upon satisfaction to itself, will pervert the operations of the judgment, restrict the play of the sympathies, and bias the decisions of the conscience. Hence, until the divine Spirit flash its convincing light upon the soul, and discover to it the exceeding sinfulness of sin, there is hardly a vice that you can charge home upon a man, but he will make it out to be a virtue. His forgetfulness of God, his regardlessness of the higher issues

of life, the absorption of his energy in the amassing of treasure—these will be diligent thrift and honest industry; his selfish endeavours for personal distinction will be esteemed a commendable regard for the opinion of his fellows; his resentfulness will be proper spirit; his miserliness, frugality. If he be rude, and boisterous, and quarrelsome, and self-opinionated, he will take credit for independence of thought and manliness of utterance; if he be servile and yielding, it will be but the deferential courtesy which is one of the highest proprieties of life. Nay, there may be a parade of self-examination, and he may proclaim loudly that he dares enter into his own heart, and conscience may be summoned to the scrutiny; but, like Rachel during the search after her father's gods, the man will sit all the while upon his idols. Thus do men become infatuated self-deceivers, and, "concentred all on self," palliate the sins whose motions they feel within them, and clothe themselves with excellences which they do not possess. This habit of viewing all things in their selfish relations is, we need hardly remind you, opposed to that magnanimous mind which enters so largely into our ideas of "largeness of heart."

And, brethren, this is a disease which is beyond all human cure. The love of self, so deeply rooted in the nature, can only be expelled by a love that is purer and higher. Particular relationships may modify its developments; amiable instincts may repress its repulsiveness; the intercourses of society or the bonds of mutual dependence may occasionally restrain it; but it can be subjugated only to

the obedience of Christ, it can be destroyed only by an agency that is Divine. Let the Holy Spirit take for us of the things of Christ, shed abroad his love, indwell as that identifying Spirit without which we are none of his, and the churl will become bountiful, and the selfish will glow with sympathy; all that dwarfs the stature or narrows the affection will be driven from its last refuge; the eye will be keen to discover excellence, and the tongue will be generous to applaud it; and the new heart of the regenerate man will be distinguished for its largeness "as the sand that is on the sea-shore." Brethren, there will be exhibitions of beauteous contrast both in the church and in the world, if this "largeness of heart" be conferred—"Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." All that is contracted and unworthy will be replaced by all that is noble and sympathizing, and each will clasp the hand of his neighbour in fraternal recognition. You can trace out the contrast for yourselves between the unseemliness of small-hearted prejudice and the beauty of large-hearted generosity. The small hearts rush off in frantic haste to Moses, with the cry of envy on their lips—"Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp;" the large heart, rejoicing in the imparted wisdom, replies—"Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets." The small hearts, with all the airs of conscious superiority, told the tale of their own littleness, expecting approval for the deed—"Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us;" the large heart—nay, the largest heart, for it was that of

the Divine Man—replied, “Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us.” And coming from the field of Scripture into the outer world—the small heart takes heaven’s benefits as a matter of course, inhales these airs of Paradise like common breath, and its gratitude is but occasional and unworthy; the large heart bends itself in lowliest homage, and inquires, with swimming eyes, “Why such love to me?” The small heart grudges its obedience, guards prudently against any excess of attachment, and, gloating over some darling lust, asks imploringly, “Is it not a little one?” the large heart, mourning at its own worthlessness, ventures timidly to offer itself—

“I gladly give up all to thee,
To whom my *more than all* is due.”

The small heart expends all its interest on its own sect or coterie; the large heart dilates with brotherly feeling as it realizes the great world outside. The small heart is ostentatious in its liberality or in its effort, and with the flare of trumpets invites all passers-by to witness its zeal for the Lord; the large heart works in silence, for it has learned “to prize the quiet lightning deed.” The small heart, morose at the festival which celebrates the prodigal’s return, grumbles out its bitterness and displeasure—“Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf;” the large heart, brimming with a father’s tenderness and with a God’s benignity, chides and dismisses the repining—“It was meet that

we should make merry, and be glad : for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found."

3. It is *enterprising*.

The wants of the world and of the church require not only the cultivation of proper dispositions, but their appropriate expression in deeds. The man who would be a benefactor to his fellows in the world of philanthropy, or a practical Christian in the world of religion, must be a man of action as well as a man of thought. The contemplative must not encroach upon the province of the energetic. He must not only have his tabernacle on the mount, but his standing among the multitude, and his citizenship in the laborious world. Christianity is not a law hemmed in with mysteries, locked by jealous hierophants in an unapproachable temple, into whose Holy of Holies the wayfaring man may not enter. It is a life, a beautiful and healing presence, raying out warmth and light into the homes of men, giving health to the leprous and succour to the destitute, the glad evangel of the sorrowful, and the truest charter of the poor. It should therefore be the life-work of the sincere believer to exhibit his faith in its most becoming and kindly developments, and to throw himself into the work of expression with adventurous energy, and with a constancy of purpose which no difficulties can deter. But in order to this there must be the gift of "largeness of heart." Men of limited attainments and of narrow vision are vacillating in resolve, and irresolute in action. Like Reuben, they are unstable as water, and for their " manifold divisions there are great searchings of heart."

Like the Israelites, they are very cravens in the presence of danger, and would content themselves with the scantiness of the desert-heritage, when the rumour of the tall sons of Anak blanches the cheek and curdles the blood. Hence they will venture little, dare little in the cause of Christ and for the good of men.

But the men who are well furnished in Divine things, and magnanimous enough to appreciate excellence wherever its residence, will be men of lofty purpose and of commensurate endeavour. If, like Joseph, they are dreamers, like Joseph they will do their part for the fulfilment of their own dreams. All the instances of signal accomplishment, whether in Scripture or in the history of the church, have been realized by those whose "largeness of heart" has prompted them to enterprise. Moses, in the leadership of the children of Israel; Solomon, in the building of the temple; Nehemiah, as with strong patriotism and stronger faith he toiled at the rebuilding of the dilapidated wall; the apostles, as undaunted they bore from land to land the magnetic cross, and set up in the face of all people the attractive sign—all these had the faith which is the strongest motive-power; and, believing, were valiant for the truth upon the earth. Yes, brethren, and this is the secret of the whole matter. Men are large-hearted when they "fear the Lord, and know no other fear;" they can endure uncounted suffering with uncounted heroism, if only they see "him who is invisible;" they can dare the most difficult enterprise, when they have the inwrought conviction that the

Lord Jehovah "is their help and their shield." We gaze upon Luther in his hero-life, and are amazed that in the presence of frowning councils he dares to be so manfully outspoken, and that he blenches not though the timid deprecate and the cowardly shrink away from his side. We glorify God in those Waldensian confessors, who held fast the pure truth of Jesus, though pierced by the spears of Savoy and scorched by the faggots of Rome. We wonder at the long endurance of the Pilgrim Fathers, when they were hunted from their homes for conscience' sake; and though "the spray of the sea froze on them, so that their clothes were like coats of iron," they found the angry ocean less inhospitable than angry and bigoted men. We admire the courage of the devoted missionary, who, with the graves of his predecessors before his eyes, chooses the fever-home as his place of toil, or who rescues the victims which the foul fiend of superstition had already mocked with his Moloch-eye, or who, amid the roll of the Ashanti death-drum, blows the trumpet of salvation. Oh, as we gaze upon these examples of large-hearted enterprise, let us remember that faith in God—reverent and inspiring trust, which may be our own heritage if we choose to ask for it—was the secret of their heroism! Alas! that there should be so little of this realizing faith amongst us.

Brethren, what are we doing? There are plenty that will hire us. Why stand we here all the day idle? The harvest is ready; why droops it in heavy and neglected masses for want of reapers to gather it in? The world perishes; why are not our hands active in the service, and our feet swift to the rescue? The

devil is alive and watchful ; why slumbers the church ? Brethren, I would that the Holy Spirit would breathe upon our hearts on this matter, showing us the good we hinder, and the evil to which we are accessory ! Mischief sown every moment in the field, and we sleeping the while, or coolly accounting for the crop of tares—"An enemy hath done this." Young people corrupted whom we might have led to God. Entangled souls whom we have forborne to deliver. Erring ones whom a look of pity would have cheered, or a word of kindness humbled, but who for want of them have been hardened. Spirits, it may be—oh, thought appalling !—that have gone down to perdition, and are beyond all hope or mercy, whom we might have reached and saved. There is enough in the vision to drive us to our closets and to our knees. Bending low before our Master and our God, let us remain there in that posture of contrition and of shame until our indolence and treachery are forgiven, until our vows of future service be breathed, heard, accepted, and until there come down upon us the diviner baptism of "wisdom, and understanding, and largeness of heart."

II. This gift of "largeness of heart" is expressly stated to be a gift of Divine bestowment. "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and 'largeness of heart.'" And it behoves us to remember that this, like all our other blessings, comes from the Giver of "every good gift and every perfect gift." It is not attainable by long experience, nor by the play of natural and kindly impulses, nor from any of the resources of the world. Men do not

graduate into it in any human university. There is no school where it can be given as a prize. It is not on sale at the bazaar or market. This gem of priceless estimation the wealth of empires were too poor to buy. It is the free gift of God. But he gives it on certain terms; and the conditions of evangelical large-heartedness are in large measure the conditions of physical health—*air, food, exercise, discipline*; all these are necessary to the attainment of “largeness of heart.”

1. *It must have pure air.*

Men cannot breathe freely and live healthily in ill-ventilated dwellings. Image to yourselves some squalid quarter of our large towns, some street of dilapidated houses, some noisome alley, reeking with unwholesome odours, upon which the day never looks, for the fog keeps out the sun, where life-giving air rarely flutters its feeble wing, where fever reigns by house-row, and want and dirt and crime encamp and revel in the feculent neighbourhood. Is it there you go for health? Is it there that strength is nurtured into its proportions of colossal power? Is it not rather on the tufted heather? or in the meadow where the peasant whistles at his plough? or on the difficult hills, where the hardy mountaineers are climbing on the track of the gazelle? And evangelical large-heartedness, the health of the soul, can be obtained only by dwelling in a healthy district, and cultivating a heavenly communion. It cannot live in a confined region. It is stifled where ignorance has shut out the light, and where selfishness has carbonized the atmosphere. From the neighbourhood of littleness, and prejudice, and sin—those notorious streets in the City of Destruction—it hastes,

often through the Slough of Despond, to where the light shineth brightly, and the wicket-gate openeth into heaven.

2. *It must have suitable food.*

This, as everybody knows, is an essential condition of physical health, and is far more closely connected with moral questions than we have been willing to imagine. To secure the body's vigorous growth, there must be in the food that is furnished to it both suitability and nourishment. The child must not be pampered with the aliment suitable only for the man, nor must the man be enfeebled by the food that is adapted for the child. And where shall this suitable nutriment, tending to largeness of heart, be found, save in the Divine Word? As men are said to be spiritually begotten by the word, so the word is presented in the Scriptures as the instrument of growth and increase. Thus the apostles—"As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:" "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." And it is the answer of the blessed Saviour in the time of his sore temptation in the wilderness—"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Brethren, if we would have an army of evangelical soldiers, approved and despatched to the battlefield, they must be like Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures, wielding "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." And if we would have in our own hearts the blessing of enlargement, let us cherish and study the inspired Word of God. Our views will enlarge as we

look at matters in the light of the Word, our affections will be broader and deeper as the Word expands them, our sympathy will be more genial in its exhibitions, and will tend to finer issues, if it has been excited under the spirit of the Word; our purposes will be ardent if we catch our inspiration from the Word; our deeds will be deeds of heroes, if the Word, hidden in our hearts, is at once our fortitude and our valour.

3. *It will need healthful exercise.*

The bad effects of close confinement and of vitiated air are patent to us all. They are displayed in the pallid cheeks and stunted growth of the slaves of the long-hour system of business; and they are written in blood upon the lone heart of many a widowed mother, who has had her son brought home from the great city with death upon his lungs. There must be exercise, if there would be health; regimen and method, if there would be impunity from disease; and, in like manner—

4. *Discipline*, if there would be control, sobriety, and “largeness of heart.” God employs various circumstances of trial to work this blessing in his people. Thus the tempting desert was the school of Moses, and the tempting court of Babylon the school of Daniel. Paul learned more in his many hazards and in his gospel journeys than he had acquired at the feet of Gamaliel; and amid the drear solitudes of Patmos, the heart of the apostle was made large enough for the Revelation of John the Divine. And in ordinary life God employs this discipline still. Enlargement of heart is not to be gained amid conventual silence or monastic rule. It must be sought amongst the free fellowship of wrestling, differing, rejoicing, suffering men. We im-

part wisdom to others, but we gain it also in the process. To be sympathetic with another's sorrow subdues our pride, and melts our hardness, and prepares us the better to grapple with our own. We rub warmth into the limbs of the frosted man, but the very effort relaxes from ourselves the blue gripe of the deadly cold. We direct a contrite sinner to the Saviour, and listen to his first anthems of filial praise; and our own hearts are reminded of their first love, and quickened into a devotion intenser than before.

III. Brethren, have you this "largeness of heart"? You must have it; we must all have it, if our religion is to be worth anything, either for this world or for that which is to come. Breathing in healthful air, nourished by the Divine Word, hardy with the exercise and discipline of life—go up to the mountain and ask of God in prayer. Do as Moses did in the matter of the tables of stone. The first tables which were broken in pieces were of God's own furnishing. The second he must himself prepare. Diligently was the preparation done. Wearily he toiled up Sinai's rugged steep, and, having gained the crest of it—with lifted hands and head reverently bowed—he held up the tables for the writing of the Lord.

God is still on the top of the mountain. At his right hand, in merciful presence, the Divine Intercessor speaks and pleads. Bow yourselves before the glorious vision. Faltering, but earnest, let your prayer be heard, "Lighten our darkness, O Lord!" Dispel our prejudice and bigotry by thy power. Let thy loving-kindness chase our littleness away. "We will run

the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge our heart." And as you pray there is silence in heaven, and the eternal Father looks upon the face of his Anointed, and the Saviour shows his wounds, and claims his recompense, and the answer comes : " It is done." " Great is thy faith ; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

XXXI.

DUTY TOWARDS MINISTERS.

“Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers ; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church : whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well : Because that for his name’s sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.”—3 JOHN 5-8.

“**T**HE elder” speaks these words. The definiteness of the article seems to indicate that the distinction was one which might be rightfully assumed, and that the person who thus designates himself was of riper age, or of more distinguished office, than any other in the Christian church at the time. This consideration goes far to fix the authorship of these Epistles. None surely could write thus but that venerable apostle, latest of the band to linger, who was closing his beloved life in Ephesus ; and whose last counsels were of the love which he had never ceased to cherish, since he drank it in upon the Master’s bosom. It is the outpouring of one loving Christian heart to another. “The well-beloved Gaius,” or Caius, as the Latins would call him, may or may not be identified with the Gaius who figures among St. Paul’s salutations in the sixteenth of Romans,

though there was a kinship at any rate in the virtue of Christian hospitality, as Paul describes him "my host, and of the whole church;" but he stands as the winsome type of a thorough and whole-souled Christian man—a model layman of the early church. He may have been in feeble health—many of God's jewels are framed in a frail setting. We do not gather that he was exceptionally wealthy, but he was affluent in the riches of a liberal spirit; the savour of his charity was borne abroad by the testimony of strangers; he rendered ungrudging and helpful service to the missionaries among the Gentiles; and he did it not for ostentation's sake, but "faithfully," as part of a recognised stewardship for which he must give an account. Then, further, he was not merely hospitable—making his generosity, after the fashion of some, to "cover a multitude of sins"—he had a firm persuasion of the truth; he walked in it with consistent footsteps. He was spiritually-minded, an active helper in all works of faith and love. No wonder his name had a charm in it which won upon the heart of the apostle. No wonder that he embalms him in his Epistle, and hands down his name to immortality for the stimulus and benefit of the churches of all time. The church has need of men like-minded still. The scriptural types of lay-helpfulness need to be reproduced amongst us. The modern Apollos needs Aquila and Priscilla to "show him the way of God more perfectly." There is yet room for Dorcas and her "garments of praise"—for "the spirit of heaviness" still hangs upon the poor. There is deaconesses' work in other spheres than at Cenchrea. We want our local ensamples who, like

Demetrius, "have good report of all men, and of the truth itself;" Obed-Edoms, with the ark in the house; Mnasons, mellow with their "fruit in old age;" Simeons waiting in the temple; Gaiuses "bringing" their pastors "on their journeys after a godly sort"—we need them in the midst of us to-day. In these days especially, when there is such a blessed quickening in the sense of personal responsibility and service—when ears, formerly dull, are strained to catch the Lord's whispered summons—when the whole church as with one voice, and that a mighty voice, is asking, "Lord! what wilt thou have me to do?"—it cannot be amiss to urge upon ourselves, whatever our sphere or the measure of our influence, to become "fellow-helpers to the truth."

Amongst the holy solemnities which our Annual Conference brings, none are more interesting and more solemn than the reception of candidates into the ministry, and their ordination to that sacred office. If we are spared for the services of the coming week, crowds will gather to hear their testimonies for the truth, and to witness their public separation to their sphere of lifelong service. It is proper that the members of our churches should be deeply and profoundly stirred; for their own soul's prosperity, and the prosperity of the commonwealth of the faithful, are largely bound up with the good or evil influence of these men. It will be my duty—in connection with their designation to the fulness of their office by the laying on of hands of the presbytery—to address to their heart and conscience seasonable truth, as God may enable me to speak it. I believe it to be equally

my duty to remind you—the people—that you have duties to your ministers of which you cannot rid yourselves, and which it were folly and sin to disregard. If Joshua is to fight manfully with the foe in the plain—if Moses, on the slopes of the hill, is to offer his princely and prevailing prayer—Aaron and Hur must inspire the warrior's valour by holding up the intercessor's hands. Will you bear with me, therefore, while I urge you, with all plainness, that if you would "be fellow-helpers to the truth," you must "take heed how you hear," you must "esteem" your ministers "highly in love for their works' sake." You must, as this same apostle elsewhere expresses it, "look to yourselves lest they lose their full reward."

The minister and the people make up the church. A church is not only a "congregation of faithful men," who live and are glad in the riches of abundant privilege. A church is a school of testimony. A church is an organized force for the propagation of the truth which has been entrusted to it. It is of the essence of the constitution of a church, therefore, that there should be fellowship, control, and well-adjusted division of labour. The minister has his sphere and his work, his relations to his flock and to his Master. These are well-marked and intelligible; and if he fail in his duty, he must answer it when the Assize is held, and before the Judge from whom nothing can be hidden. But he cannot do his people's work, and it were useless and foolish to try. They have personal duties and services which they cannot transfer. He cannot watch and pray in their stead, nor "mortify the deeds of the body," nor evolve from them the radiance of a holy

character, nor buy on their behalf a sort of vicarious right to heaven. And, just as their experience in the Christian life must be personal, their activities in the Christian service must be personal also. They must dwell in the mount, if they would act upon the multitude for good. If they would be approved servants, they must be ready and strong, as those who are commissioned from the king. They must absorb the Sun's rays, if they would "let" their "light shine before men." In a word, no solitary duty of the Christian life can be performed by proxy. The call is not upon the mass, but upon the individual. It is not you, the community; it is "thou," the man. "I have chosen *thee*." "Go *thou* and work in my vineyard." "Be *thou* faithful unto death."

And this is one distinguishing excellence of Protestant Christianity. I know of no other system in the world which has no priests. In the olden acceptation of that word—and that which so many are now seeking to revive—there are none in Protestant Christianity. When men call themselves in this sense priests, their Protestantism commits suicide in the utterance of the word. When the charge of priestcraft is brought against the ministers of Christ, it is brought in ignorance of the nature of their office; for the differences between the priest and the pastor are so many and so radical, that they cannot be honestly confounded. A priest offers sacrifice; a pastor points to a complete sacrifice which has been offered once for all. A priest assumes to be a mediator; a pastor relies, both for himself and for his people, upon the sole and sovereign mediation of Christ. A priest derives his power over conscience

from his supposed knowledge of occult mysteries from which the people are excluded; a pastor's power over conscience is in direct proportion to the truth which he enforces and reveals. A priest retains the key of sacred knowledge in his own hands, and doles out the treasure to those who propitiate or pay; a pastor summons all men, in Christ's name, to "search the Scriptures" that they may live. In fine—when we think of a priest, we think of one who does certain duties in another's stead; when we think of a pastor, we think of one who is set apart to urge upon all men to do their own duty, and to "work out" their "own salvation" through faith, and in the sight of God. Now there is some danger lest those who have renounced the theory should in practice subside into the comfortable heresy of priesthood—by leaving the minister, unsupported and often discouraged, to do all the work of the church. This is precisely the evil against which I wish to warn you.

The current talk nowadays is of the people's rights. Suffer me to beguile you into a consideration of their duties. You are called, each of you who has put on Christ, to a sphere of personal service. No solitary member of the church is exempt from this paramount obligation. It is by this interpenetration of effort and sympathy that churches live and grow. God has called the ministers into their work; but their work links itself with yours, and requires yours as its complement and perfectness. It has been said of the prayers of the former time, that "all the intercessions which ever rose—Adam's for the race—Abraham's for the Hebrew—Paul's for the Gentile—Christ's for the world—are

delayed their fullest influence until we complete them." And it is true of effort as of prayer. The minister's service without yours "cannot be made perfect." Carry your thoughts back among the Israelites, roused from their criminal apathy by the prophet's appeals. What a description of zealous and united labour for God! "And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." There is also a beautiful illustration of mutual encouragement and blessing in the 134th Psalm. It consists but of three verses—the first two of which are a benediction invoked upon a band of watchers—the last being the response of the company to the blessing of the friendly singer. Those who are thus commended in blessing are the Levites who are the guardians of the temple in the night—who hold their eyes from slumber lest some thief should filch the treasure, lest the lamps go out, or lest the fire upon the altar of burnt-offering be suffered to die. The singer is the officer who closes the gates of the temple. As he takes his leave, he sings this vesper hymn—"Behold! bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord." Refreshed and strengthened for their night-watch, they sound out the responsive music—"The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion." Now it is this, shown not in the lip-song merely, but in the calm

consistency of the life to which I would urge you to-day. You are Christians? Then you are bound to work for Christ. You are members of the visible church. You have realized that central idea, that first necessity of churchmanship, union with your Saviour? Then, emulous of his example, "For Zion's sake you will not keep silence, and for Jerusalem's sake you will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." But you are more than this. You have not only enlisted in the army; you have chosen the regiment under whose banners you are to serve and war. The social law, which works all nature through, has drawn you into fellowship with Christians of like views and preferences, for the mutual maintenance of faith and for the more effectual outworking of your plans of holy toil. It may not be out of place to say here, that the existence of the denomination—an inner circle within the church—is neither without use nor without warrant. It springs, indeed, from the very liberty of Christianity, and is an almost necessary adjunct of a free church life. Sects, of course, ought not to be needlessly multiplied, and they should keep, at the heart of them all, the life-blood of divinest charity; but they are not in themselves evil, nor are they incompatible with the essential and catholic unity for which the Saviour prayed. They may be but as the graceful varieties of nature, tributary to her grand central harmony—the prismatic colours, preserving their individual distinctness, and yet melting into each other to form the bow which spans the cloud. Then, if you have

identified yourselves with the fellowship which you prefer, *that* is your sphere of service. Its members are your brethren ; its ministers your pastors ; its fortunes your charge, in a sense in which no other can be. You are not to be so wonderfully loving to all, that you have no particular affection for any. You are not to beat the wasteful air in profitless energy. You have home-ties, home-duties, home-work, and, "standing in your lot," you are *there* to be "fellow-helpers of the truth." I solemnly believe that you, as representing the laity of the Methodist Church, have its prosperity largely in your own keeping. I am the more urgent, therefore, that you be "co-workers" with your ministers for God. You are summoned, then, to hold up your ministers' hands—to help them in the doing of their work by the conscientious doing of your own.

The great requirement to this end is *sympathy*—the penetration of your whole nature with love of "the truth" you are to help, and of your "fellow-helpers" in the glorious mission ; the enlistment in the service of every force and feeling, chastened but not weakened by the grace of God ; the enkindling of strong affection for the work, and for the workers also, "for the work's sake." This sympathy is the secret of all active Christian helpfulness—and where it "flows as a river," there will be many branching streams. It will prompt to *charity*, to *liberality*, to *enterprise*, to *prayer*.

I. *It will prompt to charity*—a generous construction of motive, aim, and conduct. If your ministers

are sent of God, you will receive them "in the name of a prophet," that you may "receive a prophet's reward." But who is a prophet? Simply a *man* to whom God has given a voice and a message. He does not cease to be a man because he has been lifted into an office, the burden of whose duties his own strength is too feeble to sustain. Rather is his humanness weighted with abnormal conditions of disadvantage, because he is compelled to the front, and must live in the fierce light of the world's eye. There has been a half-acknowledged heresy on this matter, which has done immense mischief. Men have come to imagine, that a minister is invested with separate and almost alien sanctity—is lifted above the temptations which assail ordinary men—is sheltered in some nook of grace from the stern onset of evil. There can be no more baneful mistake. Ministers are not angels, but men—with the same besetting dangers, the same weariful restlessness, the same traitorous hearts. They have natures as perverse, and wills as rebel, and sorrow crushes them as readily as the poorest of their flock; they need as urgently as any to be weighed in merciful scales of judgment.

Beloved brethren, do not err in this regard. Look into your own hearts, those of you who have experience of the Christian life. Remember how your trials have multiplied—how your duties have tried you, so that you have often done them in weariness and trembling—how your sufferings have tried you, so that the "shrinking flesh must needs complain, and murmur to contend so long"—how your surroundings have tried you, and you have felt it

difficult, amid many entanglements and under all conditions, to be brave for Jesus. Think of the boding fears, and sad misgivings, and giant hindrances which have haunted and harassed you, and made your heavenward progress so often a warfare and a struggle; and then, when these memories are most vivid, remember that all of trial which you have felt presses upon your ministers in equal measure, and that they have discouragements peculiar to their office, of which you know nothing, but which make their burden heavier to bear. They have resigned some of their personal liberty, and put themselves under a self-imposed restraint, that they may be the ministers of God to you for good. Their service, their endowments, their reputation, their life—they have put, so to speak, into the church's hands. It is your duty to guard faithfully that which they have in good faith entrusted to your keeping, and to see to it that you suffer no anxieties which you can ward off to consume their life, nor any slander which you can repel to whisper venomously their good name away. Be tender and loving in your judgment of their public doings. If a sermon seems to you feeble, remember how many other sermons have been strong—and how, even from the feeblest and faultiest, you can gather more gospel teaching than you are prepared to carry out into the life. Remember the close connection between this body of our humiliation and the mind which it enshrines—and how the aching head, or the deranged digestion, or the bruised and paining nerves, may rob the spirit of its self-possession and of its power. Ask yourselves, whether there may not have been untoward

influences in the congregation which have sometimes hindered his vigour and freedom. He is not insensible to the stare of the thoughtless, and the laughter of the trifling, and the impatient rustle of the wearied, and the noisy intrusion of the late comer—not to mention that very poor help to pulpit power, the equivocal approval of the slumberer's assenting head. Nay, do not hesitate to search your own hearts. You blame him that he was not sufficiently experimental, or plain, or doctrinal, or practical, as the bias of your criticism may happen to incline. You thought him in a sickly condition to preach—are you quite sure that you were in a healthy condition to hear? Had you cooled from the fitful fever of the week? Had you quite washed the gold-dust from your busy fingers? Did no thought of sale and bargain mingle with worship-song and sermon? Were your lips warm with the prayer which you had just offered—that he might be able to speak strong words, and heal sick hearts, and stir the consciences of men? Brethren, there are proprieties of hearing as well as of preaching; and if our congregations must wait for acceptance, until they had graduated into proper dispositions for the heedful hearing of the Word, there are perhaps some even here who would be kept a long time upon trial. Oh, give me a censorious church—hard, stern, keenly critical—exacting its requirement of service like an Egyptian taskmaster, and I need look no further for the cause of many an apparent ministerial failure. Give me a loving, hearty people, generous in their judgments, considerate in their claims, ever like the Master, slower to censure than to encourage—and for such a people

any minister, whose soul is in his work, will not grudge the costliest he can render, even if it should involve the offering of the life and of the blood.

II. *This sympathy will prompt to liberality*—that is, an adequate and liberal provision for your minister's support. They have a right to expect this at your hands. They have foregone the chances of business, trusting to your faith and honour. The same ability which fits them for their high office, if exerted in other spheres, might have made them wealthy, even wealthier than yourselves. The care of the soul is certainly as important, and should be as well recompensed, as the care of the health or the care of the estate. The minister's claim to his stipend rests upon a law of heavenly appointment; and it is the same law which regulates the salary of the statesman, the returns of the merchant, and the wages of the poor. In all labour there is profit. It is the right of every man to live by sweat of brow or brain; and "they who preach the gospel" are to "live of the gospel," according to the Word of God. There are high spiritual reasons—reasons affecting the prosperity of the cause of Christ—why the apportionment of the minister's stipend should be liberal, and the payment of it prompt and kindly. He has a great work to do, and he ought not to be called down from it by the comfortless pressure of financial cares. He needs the Tabor experience and the Tabor communion. Don't cloud his brow with the disquiet of straitened means, and of a dubious equality between the winner and the spender. If he is to do your souls good, he must be

bold to reprove you, if you need it. Let him not be ground into an unworthy dependence, destructive of self-respect. That were at once the meanest and cheapest way to turn the rebuke of a prophet into the unheeded anger of a child. If the churches value the manliness and spiritual power of their teachers, they will lift them above present embarrassment and the dread of penury ; for when want, either personal or relative, looms upon the soul, it is the deadliest destroyer of the energy, and the surest tempter to evil. If the ministers are men of Christ's choosing, they will have trampled out of their hearts the love of money ; but they have a rightful claim that a just and generous award shall be made to them—not with the airs of the patron, "not grudgingly nor of necessity"—by the people of their charge. "Who goeth a warfare at any time of his own cost ? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof ? or who feedeth a flock and eateth not of the milk of the flock ?" "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your worldly things ?" These sentences which you listen to in your heart's tenderest moments—when with wishful longing you await the Lord's coming to the feast—embody the teaching of the Word and your duty in this behalf ; and he, the Highest, whom you serve, has joined in a wedlock, which no man may divorce, the liberality of earth and the spiritual bountifulness of heaven. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you

out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

III. *This sympathy will prompt to enterprise*—a warm and willing co-operation in all that tends to the glory of Christ, or the extension of his kingdom. We cannot too often remind ourselves that spiritual prosperity cannot be achieved by a minister's unaided effort, but must result from the intelligent and hearty work of the whole church. If a leader has no followers, how shall he gather to a head of power? If a captain has no army, or his soldiers be mutinous or craven, what avails his generalship in the field? In this age, especially, of quickened desire and zeal, there is no room for idlers in the temple of the Lord. That figment of old and foolish Popery which absorbs the work in the priest, and bids the people stand listlessly by, has no place in the sympathy of the true minister, nor in the heart of the living church. Christ has something for each of his members to do. The meanest and the mightiest; the disciple who has just taken the free yoke upon him, and longs to prove his loyalty by service; the veteran who, from the summit of his honoured age, looks back upon a long life of toil and conquest; the child whose dawning gaze has fastened on the Saviour; the patriarch of years, who waits in the Beulah-land the summons to the King in his beauty—for each there is an allotted field of toil and a promised recompense of honour. It may be that your sphere is contracted and your influence small; but he—who inspired the stripling shepherd boy to smite the Philistine, and gained the

victory for Gideon's army without the handling of a sword or bow, and subdued the nations by the invincible tenderness of *the Name* in which the apostles preached—can use a worm to thresh a mountain still, and can make your unostentatious work a power for the creation of other powers which may avail to win the world. Without this enlistment of personal service, it is impossible that there should be permanent success. The minister may preach well and faithfully, and individuals may profit and be saved, but there can be no glorious ingathering to awaken and to justify the joy of harvest. Without personal service the most perfect systems are mere cumbrous machinery—useless for saving purposes, unless there be “the Spirit in the wheels.” How is it with you, dear brethren? Are you working? Are you putting forth the energy and self-denial of the “fellow-helper to the truth”? Your fathers did noble work; held up the hands of God's ministers without fear or faltering; and earned a good degree among those worthies of renown, who fearless “for their Master stood.” You cherish their memory. Their traditions live with you. You mourn their loss; but are you only to be mutes at the funeral? Did you bury your own spiritual manhood in their graves? Are you so enamoured of their memory, that you have no heart to imitate their example? Dear brethren, ponder these questions, I pray you. Are there not some of you who were sometime very willing helpers, but whose activity and zeal are matter of history now? You fell out of the ranks, you hardly know how or why—perhaps on the plea of increasing business, or municipal

honours, or fancied infirmities, or advancing years—or perhaps in times of recreancy and of peril you grew despondent and out of heart. You essayed to embody the Revelation angel, and you flew forth with your gospel through the azure and in the sunshine; but when the storm came you furled your timorous wing; or, perhaps, in the midst of your usefulness there came a little cloud, not alas! of blessing, but of shadow—

“A something light as air—a look,
A word unkind or wrongly taken;
And love which tempests never shook,
A touch, a breath like this hath shaken.”

And the slight, or the opposition, or the calumny—all of them parts of the believer's heritage—overcame your old attachments, and you left the city for the wilderness, and are useless and solitary now. Brethren, come back and do your first works, and feel your first love. Do you ask for a call to duty? Gather the lesson from the experience of the Incarnate Saviour—“*My meat* is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” The doing of his Father's will was to him as necessary food. And what is to be your call? *Hunger of heart to work for God and souls*; or, if you need others, listen to the wail of the perishing—perishing at your own doors. There is a call, as from a hundred mouths. The harvest, which the sun and rain of heaven have combined to ripen, drooping in neglected masses for want of reapers to gather it in. There is a call. And he, the Lord of the harvest, issues to you his rebuke and his encouragement—his rebuke, like thunder in a clear sky—“To him that

knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin"—his encouragement, like music in the interval of storms—"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me."

IV. *This sympathy will prompt to prayer.*—You are well enough instructed in the Christian's life to know, that, however lengthened it may be, there is no moment of it when he can cease from the cry of helplessness—from the invocation of new grace—from the expression of the longings of spiritual desire. If you have thought otherwise, you will be let into some humbling secrets by and by. And if you think that a cause of Christ can be built up by one man's labour in the pulpit, and by many men's labour in the church, you will find your mistake full soon. Confusion of tongues will be the token of heavenly displeasure; and in the ruins of your prostrate Babel, the vaunt of your atheism will be seen to be a discarded lie. The danger, perhaps, in this age of unflagging activities, is in the forgetfulness of our utter dependence, and in the presuming trust in our systems or our efforts, rather than in the Divine Agent who alone can make them mighty. The nerveless limb stiffens into catalepsy, I know, but there is such a thing as an arm palsied through excessive use; and while we are to be as active as if the success depended upon our unaided strength, we are always to remember, that we can do just nothing at all in real transforming work "until the Spirit be poured out from on high." We spread the sails, but the breath of God must fill them, and waft the vessel of our hopes to its haven by the

shining shore. Now, dear brethren, you are summoned to pray; to hallow your gifts by prayer; to energize your efforts by prayer; to bring "free course" to the Word, and a glory on it which makes the people wonder, by prayer. You expect your minister to pray. You think you can discover the measure of his individual devotion by the halo that is round him, or by the halting of his speech and spirit. But is the prayer to be all on one side? Are you under no obligation too? Think you, there is no difference felt when you come prayerless to the sanctuary, with dull face and leaden feet, and when you come from the summit of the mountain with shinings on your forehead and fragrance in your breath, and your faces glad as with pleasant memories of a friend? I tell you, it makes all the difference between barrenness and blessing. Give us praying churches, and we shall have the commanding ministry, and aroused sinners, and communities aflame with zeal for God and souls, and a very gracious rain, and an opened and peopled heaven. Oh, if the millennial time of the church is ever to dawn—if ministers are to be free from shallow conceits and questions which engender strife—if the old gospel is to swell grandly forth from lips which are strong to speak it—in a word, if Pentecost is ever to triumph over Babel, and the world's many tongues merge into the one language of praise and worship—it will be, when every believing heart is a praying heart, when it shall set itself to prayer with its whole desire absorbed for its fulfilment; and when there shall be such a concert of mighty and prevailing supplication, that the feeblest shall rise into the strength of David,

and David, purified from all shame and weakness, shall be as an "angel of the Lord."

And now, dear brethren, suffer this word of exhortation. The mission which God has given to us is not yet fulfilled. Our church is still needed, for testimony and for aggression. We, its ministers, humbled before God for our numerous shortcomings, which we feel more painfully than you can do, are yet inflamed with intensity of desire to covenant afresh, and to go forth to our work with greater earnestness than ever, and with a baptism of the Holy Ghost. We want all our churches to join us in the hallowed compact. Whatever your past may have been—whether lukewarm like Laodicea; or, like Ephesus, that you have languished from your first espousal's ardour; or, like Sardis, that you have been living the life of the paralyzed, now with a little strength, and now "just ready to die"—let us all gird ourselves anew for warfare and for triumph. To the most corrupt and slothful, he, the All-merciful, speaks—"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Then he loves us still. He begins his address to the blameworthy by marking anything which he can find to commend. He closes in each case by a starry promise to the conquerors. The tree of life, the hidden manna, the white stone, the white raiment, the confessed name, the established pillar, the new and more glorious name, the share of the throne—oh ravishing fulness of blessing!—*even as* the Saviour shares the throne of his Father; all these in store for "him that overcometh." Then let us grasp the promises. By the blessing of God they may be ours; and under their inspiration let us pay

our vows, more solemn, more self-denying, more complete in their whole-hearted surrender of ourselves to Christ, than we have ever done before; that so, to the last courses of the sun, our Methodism, if God need it, may be a witnessing unity—an earnest ministry made strong by the fellow-helping of an earnest church.

XXXII.

FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP: A CHARGE TO YOUNG MINISTERS.

“Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.”—LUKE xii. 42, 43.

“**W**HAT I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch.” This is the burden of this chapter’s message, impressed in many varieties of homely and solemn illustration: by the certainty of the last revelation, by the ever-watchful providence of God, by the rich man doomed amidst his dreams of wealth, by the servants waiting for their master from the wedding, by the good man’s vigilance when the thief is stealthy and nigh. In their original utterance there seemed a doubt whether these were general warnings, addressed to the whole church, or whether they were applied especially to the witnesses whom Christ had chosen; and Peter—spokesman, perhaps, of the unuttered thought of others—asked the question, “Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?” Our Lord answers in the words of the text—words which, while they assume the Church’s obligation to watchfulness to be not less binding, fasten upon the ministers

of Christ a responsibility commended by loftier sanctions, and involving graver issues ; so that if it behoves a believer to be watchful, and faithful, and wise, upon the minister presses double necessity ; and that he, if he overcome and be approved, is the heir of a sublimer recompense, and if he fail and be condemned, of a more appalling doom.

Amongst the many passages which bear upon ministerial character and service, I have selected this on which to ask your attention at this very interesting and very solemn crisis in your lives. To you it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the present hour. The hopes and anxieties of years are crowded into it. If you have thought of it rightly, it has been a burden upon your souls, an occasion for searching of heart, a time whose approach has stirred the depths of your being to watchfulness, weeping, and prayer. This hour, for you, is the central hour of your life. All the past has converged to it ; all the future starts from it. It compresses the obligations of time—it is charged with the destinies of eternity. In the presence of the God whom you have sworn to serve—in the presence of Christian people, whose wealth is in your character and usefulness, and to some of whom you may have to minister the Word of life—in the presence of watching angels, and of glorified spirits, dear to some of you, who look down with loving eyes from the reward—in the presence, it may be, of scoffers who deride your calling, and of adversaries, both earthly and spiritual, who watch for the halting of your feet—you are here to take upon you the vows of the Christian ministry, at once the noblest

profession and the most solemn responsibility upon earth. It is a duty of my position to counsel and to cheer you—to remind you of the character which it behoves you to attain, and to stimulate you with the hope of the recompense which awaits your toil. I come to this task under the constraint of office, having over you the melancholy advantage of years, but sad with a strong sense of shortcoming in my own soul. With lofty conceptions of the ideal of ministerial character, and a sincere love of it, and an earnest purpose for its attainment, I speak to you, “not as though I had already attained.” I have to urge you to become what I am not, but only striving to be; I can but indicate the glory of which I have caught only the faint and distant radiance; I can but point you to the pure bright summit, from the far slopes up which I am painfully climbing. If my counsels are shorn of their authority by this confession, give me credit for that sympathy with yourselves which may be an element of power instead. Listen, not to the teacher of unapproachable sanctity, but to the *brother* in experience, in infirmity, in struggle, in desire. The standard is the same, although we fail to reach it. Pressed beneath the same sanctions, animated by the same hopes, reliant on the same Almighty arm, “come, and let us reason together” of the minister and his reward.

There are various similitudes under which, each in its own aspect of fitness, the office of the ministry is presented; but the ideas of trust and of responsibility are leading and present in them all. The minister is the dresser of the vineyard, tending early and late

upon the vines; the fisher of men, toiling through the dark and in the rain; the master-builder, charged to see to it that the house is safe and strong; the shepherd, bound to feed and fold the flock, or to search through the gorge or on the mountains for the one that has wandered astray; the watchman, earnest and unwearied in the hours when other men slumber; the ambassador, to whom are confided the honour and the message of the King. In none of these, however, is there a more impressive illustration—a greater blending of trust and tenderness—than when, in the Lord's own words, the minister is the steward of the household from which the Lord is absent for a season. You will readily appreciate the fitness of the allusion. The church is a wide and loving family—a brotherhood united by sacred bonds, by community of interest, and by the love of one common Father. Of this family the steward has charge. He must provide for its wants and vindicate its honour; he must maintain its rights, preserve its purity inviolate, and cherish among its members the harmony without which the family compact would be snapped asunder; he must watch over the health and welfare of the weakest, encourage the timid, and repress the rash; he must guard equally against excess and against indifference—against the parsimony which would grudge and the wastefulness which would spend all. He has authority, therefore, but it is to be wielded only in the interest of the family and of the Father; and he must act as under the glances of a living eye, which marks his every movement, and under the pressure of the thought that his Lord may at any moment return, and ask for the account of his

doings. Now lift all these duties into the region of the spiritual; think of the family as being a family of souls on their journey to heaven, and seeking their inheritance there; think that the responsibilities of the stewardship stretch out into eternity; think that misapprehension of the steward's obligations, or failure to discharge them aright, may involve loss that is irreparable, and bow down the unfaithful one beneath the terrible guilt of blood; and then, while in the deepening sense of the awfulness of the office upon which you enter to-day, your humbled souls may well cry, as under a burden, "Who is sufficient for these things?" you will be penetrated with a desire, passionate in its intensity of strength, that when the Master comes you may be able to stand in his presence, "saved" yourselves, and "saving them that hear you."

You observe that the two great qualifications which the text implies as necessary to a successful stewardship, are those of *fidelity* and *wisdom*: "Who, then, is that faithful and wise steward?" The first of these has reference to the disposition of the heart, and the second to the due apportionment of endowment and strength. The first is the active principle, the second the discriminating application of means. In the union of these will be found the complement of the minister's qualification and the sinews of his power.

That you may be thoroughly furnished for your work, you must indeed have other qualities, upon which I cannot largely dwell. You must have *knowledge*—garnered stores of the wisdom of the olden time, the best thoughts of the best thinkers, hoarded for mental exchange. You must have *industry*—a

diligence which does not flag, which seizes upon every opportunity, wearied in the toil often, but of the work never. You must have *courage*—the best shield of faith—the bravery which, at all hazards and in all seasons, will confess the Master, stern in its denunciations of popular vices, bold in its reproofs when rank and riches sin. You must have *patience*—the hope which waits for God, though the wheels of his chariot tarry, which is not disheartened by months of discouragement and delay, which cheers itself by songs in the night, all through the winter singing of the spring which lies, flower-crowned and fair, beneath the snow. You must have *meekness*—that you may bear the indifference of the ungodly and the scoffing of the profane, enduring, sublimely as your Master, the contradiction of sinners. You must have *nobleness of soul*—to lift you above the insolent pettiness of murmuring, and vanity, and envy; the rare heroism of the Baptist, willing to decrease so that the loftier Teacher may be exalted and honoured. Above all, you must have *charity*—the yearning after souls, the travail in birth for souls; a divine, tender magnanimity of compassion, akin to that of Moses when he wished himself blotted out of the book for the children of Israel's sake—akin to that of Christ when he was “straitened” until the accomplishment of his baptism of blood.

All these, in their measure, are comprehended in the fidelity which is the prominent duty of your lives; but it is to *faithfulness*, in the full import of the word, that you are exhorted now: “It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” Nothing can compen-

sate for the lack of this. You may have talent; it will not profit. You may have popularity; that is easily acquired; and if that be all, it is a poor recompense for any man's toil. You may have an average personal experience, winning manners, and a blameless life; these negative qualities will neither do you nor the world much good. You may pass through your duties respectably, and have a good report of them that are without, and yet be destitute utterly of the true spirit of your calling, and throb with no heroic passion for saving souls. Oh, think of this! Bury it in your hearts amid the solemn sanctions of this hour: "I may be talented, popular, agreeable, blameless in the world's eye, respectable, scholarly; and yet in the sight of God accursed, because unfaithful, and sent away from the judgment with the brand of the traitor and the felon." Brethren, for myself and you, I deprecate that doom. I urge you—

I. *Be faithful in the keeping of your own souls.*—You have already testified, in the presence of the great congregation, that you have experienced, really and consciously, the change of heart, and that you are living in God's favour, and striving earnestly after the fulness of his image. We do not, knowingly, lay hands upon any who are not thus spiritually alive. The blind cannot lead the blind. Corpses cannot animate the dead. Let me affectionately remind you, that in the maintenance of your own inward life consists the secret of your power. Alas for you, if you deal in the "cold traffic of unfelt truth;" if languor or worldliness be suffered to eat out the heart of your

piety; if you relapse into formality or secret unbelief; if the flame upon the closet-altar burns dimly, or is quenched; if you minister in a service from which your affections are estranged; if the inspirations of the former time are but as a worn-out spell or an extinct volcano, with no fire in its passionate heart! What of good to the world, or of blessing to the church, can come from the ministry of a man paralyzed in soul—a man who flaunts upon his brow the shrivelled symbols of his former consecration—a man whose heart is like the sepulchre on the Resurrection morning—a thing of clothes and spices, but without a Christ? Brethren, be incessant in prayer and watching, I charge you, lest there come upon you this dishonour. Your ordination will not save you from barrenness of soul. Your ministerial status will be no help to preserve you from that declension which is your greatest peril. It is no safeguard to you that you wear the garb of piety, and speak the language of piety, and are busied day by day in the activities of piety. Nay, there is a sense in which these advantages are increased sources of danger. There is a familiarity which breeds indifference, if not contempt. In the wards of a hospital the sensibilities are blunted to suffering; on the field of battle men overcome their horror of blood. So strangely have we been warped by the Fall, that the highest excitements are apt to degenerate into the sensual and the unworthy—just as the fall from the cliff is headlong, if there be the false step on its verge. Moreover, as ministers, you are the subjects of especial assault, because a watchman slain makes the surprise of the citadel more easy; and you

are the subjects of especial temptation, because your fall would be to the adversary an occasion of peculiar triumph. You will not be free from the common allurements which beguile unwary souls. The love of ease, the love of money, the love of applause, the prompting to be selfish, and censorious, and petulant, and proud; all these will beset you as they beset ordinary men—nay, it may be with fiercer onset, for the dwellers on the mountain shiver in the terror of the blast when the peasants of the vale are unconscious that the hurricane is roused. Besides these, you will have temptations of your own, springing out of your office, in which those around you cannot share. If God gives you success, you will be tempted to elation; if you labour without visible result, you will be tempted to despond; if your work is easy, you may yield to spiritual indolence; if it is difficult, you may suffer it to master you in spiritual apathy, or vaunt that you can overcome it in spiritual pride. You must prosecute it amid counteracting influences. Your plans may be thwarted by the opposition of your associates, or by the indifference of your professed friends. Weak men will obtrude their partialities, and timid men will be unreasonably repressive, and narrow men will cherish their prejudices, and ambitious men will make sacrifices to their vanity, and sensitive men must be continually appeased, and crotchety men must be continually humoured. It will be difficult for you to preserve your soul in patience and in the meekness of wisdom. Tempted by the outside enemy and by the inner traitor, tried equally by danger and by duty, with peril lurking both in the

heart and in the office, bewildered by the magnitude of the interests committed to your frail guardianship—nothing will save you but a continual dwelling under the very shadow of the mercy-seat—a close, constant, strengthening walk with God. Brethren, be faithful in this matter! Live so near to God that the enemy cannot approach to harm. Let your ideal be the divine Saviour, who could say, looking calmly upon a world of foes, “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.” Satan will not enter the house if there be no beckoning eye from the window. Keep your spirit free from all allies of the Evil One; that so, humbly trusting in your heavenly helper, and baring your heart for divine scrutiny, you may rejoice to say—“Thou hast proved mine heart, thou hast visited me in the night, thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.”

II. *Be faithful to the truth.*—You have already testified, before many witnesses, your belief, whole-souled and earnest, of those truths which have been handed down to us from our fathers, and which are hallowed by centuries of toil and triumph. We have a right to expect of you that in this testimony you have made no rash avowal. You have had opportunities, during your years of probation, of becoming acquainted with our system of doctrine, both in the harmony of its strength and in the power with which its enforcement is attended. You have seen the

illustration of the doctrine in the life. It has been the glorying of our church, that, by the grace of God, no doctrinal controversies have disturbed it through the century of its evangelistic labour. We ask of you in confidence that you will not "make" this "glorying void." In the name of your fathers, who confide to you their trust unimpaired; in the name of the churches to which you will minister, and whom your heresy might disturb and injure; in the name of the Methodist people, to whose taste this Word has been sweet, and who cry in hunger of heart—"Evermore give us this bread;" because of the scoffing world, who will acknowledge the moral power of a whole army "valiant for the truth"—I ask you to hold fast, and to hold forth, the ancient Word of life.

There is a necessity for fidelity to the truth, especially in times like ours, when every doctrine passes through the crucible, when that which has commanded the veneration of ages is roughly handled by the sciolists of modern thought, and when even those truths on which our dearest hopes repose are in some quarters fiercely assailed, and in others lightly regarded. Perhaps there never was a time, when the enemies of the truth fought with more various weapons, or were animated by a more cruel antagonism. The ancient adversaries return to the charge as freshly as if they had never been beaten; and there are others, more subtle and dangerous, who fight in the army of the aliens, but in the armour which they have stolen from the faithful. You will have to exercise your ministry in the midst of this luxuriance of error. There will be around you a dark, ingenious

spirit of unbelief, poisoning the fresh blood of youth, and disheartening the last hope of age—sometimes, like Herod, coarsely insolent in its impiety; sometimes, like Judas, betraying the Saviour with a kiss. There will be an earnest, well-disciplined, crafty superstition, restless in its endeavours to regain its ascendancy, marshalling its forces with wonderful skill, holding to its purpose through the patient years with a zeal and devotion which it were well for its opponents to imitate; but hiding the Saviour in the drapery in which it swathes him, and hampering the free grace of his atonement by a frail and tangled network of its own. There will be a pretentious formalism, denying all connection with Romanism, but quietly doing its work—high in its asceticism, and haughty in its exclusiveness—a thing of waxwork and symbols, but with a soul of treason to the old Protestant truth. There will be a widespread indifference, more fatal than enmity, because it is so intangible that you can no more fight with it than with a shadow—a spurious liberality, which the tendencies of the age foster, proceeding on the assumption that all religions are alike, and that there is no essential difference between truth and error. There will be the avowed denial of the divinity of Jesus, or of the freeness and fulness of his grace, or of the spirituality of his reign. There will be, as it would seem, a restless and intolerant evangelism, blinding the world and deluding the unwary in the church by the utter errors of half-truths; ignoring repentance in its professed exaltation of faith; virtually discrowning the Holy Spirit in its desire to vindicate the human

spirit's freedom; substituting an Antinomian apathy for the liberty of the gospel of Christ; running a tilt against the sects, while itself is the straitest and most uncharitable of sects; consistently speaking evil of "system" from its own Babel of disorder, and yet encouraging, *on* system, attacks upon all Christian organizations in a spirit more akin to that of "robbers of churches," than of apostles to a leprous and unhappy world. There will be other forms of various and eccentric error, which it does not need to dignify by a mention; and you may take it as an axiom that no form of heresy can be too sacrilegious or too silly for the credulity of men. How needful, amidst this abounding darkness, that the light-bearers should "let their light shine before men"!

Dear brethren, your duty, always imperative, is to-day invested with more solemn obligation to hold fast, and contend earnestly for, "the faith which was once delivered to the saints." The ark is not in danger, but it must have well-furnished Levites in its service. While error has its emissaries everywhere—some from barbarous Phrygia, some from scholarly and sceptical Athens—be it yours to abide in the good old paths in which your fathers travelled to heaven. "Inwardly digest" the truth, until it is assimilated to your nature and enfibred with your every interest and affection. Take your stand, firm, calm, heroic, by the ancient altar, and from that altar let neither ribaldry nor Rationalism expel you. "Be no longer children," except in simplicity; "but in understanding be ye men." Let your faith rest with a child's reliance, and yet with a tenacity strong as the death-grasp of

a martyr, upon the "truth as it is in Jesus." You must be children of the truth if you are to be its witnesses. Feeling it in the heart, your faith a living faith, blest with its consolation and hopes, you will withstand the enemies in the gate; and though wittings deride, and scoffers sneer, and cowards basely flee, your resolve will ring out like a clarion in the ears of a world which your fidelity shall constrain to heed you—"I determine to know nothing among men, save Jesus Christ and him crucified."

III. *Be faithful to the Church of your choice, and to your brethren in the ministry.*—In the present state of the world and of the minds of men, there must be distinct organizations of believers as well as, and within, the universal church. The central thought, the great necessity of churchmanship, is of course union with Christ. But human hearts have strong chords of sympathy, by whose inevitable influence like yearns for like, and the believer longs for the companionship of those who are inspired by the same hope—both for mutual benefit, and for the completer outworking of all schemes of holy toil. Hence comes the visible church, existing not so much a mechanical idea as a social necessity—a supply for that creaturely want which abhorred the utter loneliness, even in Eden—a realization of the soul's strong instinct of brotherhood. But Christianity is the religion of intellectual freedom; it snaps the fetters alike of social and mental bondage, and secures the right of private judgment unto all. Those who are substantially agreed on the vital points without which Christianity

itself could not be, may still have minor though important differences of opinion. Here again, by the same law, like yearns for like. So comes the denomination—an inner circle within the church—neither unwarranted nor unscriptural, I take it, because it springs out of the genius of Christianity, and is almost a necessary adjunct of a free church life. The denomination becomes harmful only when it cherishes a spirit of exclusiveness or jealousy, and is forgetful of that divinest charity which is “the core of all the creeds.” The talk about absorption is, at best, an amiable dream. The crusade against church organization is at once a folly and a sin.

There is room, I think, for the exhortation to be faithful to the church which you have chosen. I am not so foolish as to claim any exclusive excellence for Methodism. I have no quarrel with other churches. I am catholic enough to wish them God-speed, and my co-operation with their work has ever been warm and willing. Each of them that is faithful to Christ has its mission from the royal signet, and in the past each of them has done some work for the world which no other has done so well; but, amid an all-embracing generosity, commend me to the man who has a home. You are to minister in the ministry of the Methodist Church. Not in vaunting, but in gratitude, we express our conviction that it is “not a whit behind the chiefest.” It has a heritage of sound doctrine, and traditions inspiring as the chronicles of ancient kings. It has a theology—broad, well-defined, scriptural—free from all unworthy limitations of the Son’s love—free from all disloyal forgetfulness of the

Spirit's grace. It has a godly discipline which it knows how to enforce, and which hedges round the enclosures in which its flocks are folded. It has a church order as effective as the most orderly, and a church life as vigorous as the most free. It has, moreover, a wondrous adaptation, not for clan or family, but for all circumstances, complexions, and climes. Unbending in its woven roots and giant trunk, like the old oak of the forest, it courts the rays of every sunbeam of the heavens, and its branches wave freely in every breeze that blows. Its past is the augury of its future, if it be not traitorous to its heavenly calling. You have a church, therefore, that is worthy to be served by leal-hearted and enterprising sons. Be faithful to it, I charge you. Do not allow it to become the vassal of any but Christ, nor the enemy of any but sin. Work for it as if you were jealous for its honour, and remember that its honour is its fidelity to the Head of the church in heaven. You have studied its doctrines, and have seen the workings of its polity. You have accorded to it your intelligent preference, and in the face of the world you testify to-day that you believe it to be the best sphere of toil in all the world for you. Keep to it "until death do you part." Bind yourselves to it with the solemnity and tenderness of a marriage vow. Don't be tempted away from it by the hope of increased respectability, or ease, or gain. Free yourselves from the unworthy littleness which motives like these imply. The prodigals who go off into the far country have sometimes only a brief enjoyment, succeeded by a famine of soul. Wander where you

will, you will not find greener pastures, nor stiller waters, nor a more rich and resting influence of God.

Be faithful also to your brethren in the ministry. They are henceforth more to *you* than common men. They are brothers in effort and affection; fellow-labourers in the Lord's work; fellow-heirs of the wealth which the Lord has promised to his children. Hold them in high esteem and honour. Guard their reputation as you would guard personal treasure. Screen them from the attacks of those who would depreciate their usefulness—ignoble assassins of the character which rebukes their own. Against envy, and malice, and slander, I hope I need not warn you. These base spirits cannot dwell in the temples of the Holy Ghost. But he, who is cunning enough to adapt the temptation to the feebleness, sometimes takes advantage of eminence in any special grace to tempt to the committal of the very opposite sin. Thus the meekest man was hurried into unadvised speaking; the hero-heart of Elijah was smitten with a coward's fear; the brave confession of Peter was neutralized by a shameful denial; the loving spirit of John would call down fire from heaven. Watch, therefore, lest in some unguarded moment you sin against the great law of love. Be frank and generous in your admiration of the excellences of your brethren. Leave to others to carp, and shrug the shoulder, and damage by the hint of speech or by the hint of silence. No meaner reputation can cling to a minister than that his people should say of him—"Yes! he is able, and might be useful too; but he never speaks a good word of his brethren." Of all churches, the sus-

picious church will be the least prosperous—just as of all characters the censorious is the most unlovely. Let nothing but absolute wrong-doing destroy your faith in those with whom you associate; and in that case, if discipline is faithfully exercised, you will associate with them no longer. Guard against a bitter, factious spirit of partisanship. Resist, as you value the church's spirituality and peace, anything that would reduce it to a political confederacy, or assimilate its practices to those of political strife. "Be pitiful, be courteous." These are the apostolic expressions of love to the brethren. Cherish that nobility of soul which thinks so much of the Master that it has no time nor room for overweening thought of itself. Do not be quick to imagine personal slights, nor to nurse little troubles into colossal injuries. The true ministerial dignity is that of a king, to whom it never occurs that any should question his royalty; or that of a high priest of the temple, secured by a spotlessness and honour which have never known shadow or stain. Oh! for the times of the old gospel morality! "In honour preferring one another;" "each esteeming the other better than himself;" modesty, taking the lowest room at a festival; self-sacrifice, content to be derided and forgotten; humility, washing the disciples' feet; meekness, "enduring contradiction;" charity, long-suffering, and yet uniformly kind; pride and anger trampled under the feet, while self-mastery climbs the moral height of forgiveness to a seventy-times-seven offender. Let us have this morality exhibited in the associate heralds of any church, and their life will make their word a power;

the love in their hearts will flash through the eye, and kindle on the tongue; and, as on the banks of the bright Chebar river, in the demonstration of the Spirit in their ministry, men shall see "visions of God."

IV. *Be faithful in the great work of preaching to dying men.*—You are to be the Christian minister everywhere—in the pastorate, in the parlour, in the Sabbath school, in the official meeting, in your intercourse with the churches, out in the broad arena of the world—and there are important duties connected with each sphere of service which you must not allow yourselves to disregard. You must be faithful in that which is least. You are not at liberty to choose among the commandments. There must be no fragments broken off the table of stone. But I speak to you now in regard to your greatest work—that which is to be henceforth the business of your lives. I speak to you as preachers of the Word. In spite of the cavil of the modern Pharisee, and the clamour of Sadducean indifference, the pulpit is yet upon its throne. Amid the strife of tongues, its voice is still commanding. God's witnesses, if they witness truly, will make their testimony felt. The world's conscience is not dead; and as often as the ministering witness speaks in power from without, the accusing or approving monitor is busy with its answer from within. I know there are those who tell us that preaching is an effete ordinance—well enough for the childhood of the world, but outgrown by the culture of its riper years. Brethren, *it is not true*; and, if the preachers do not shame their calling, it never shall

be true. Give us the prophet's lips of flame, and the spell-bound listeners shall linger on Carmel still. I want to rouse you to the remembrance of your duty and your privilege. To stand, like the angel in the sun, that you may fling down the healing of his rays; or between the living and the dead, like the priest who stayed the plague—to arouse the sleeping from their slumber, and the dead in sins out of their graves—to bear God's offers of reconciliation to the worst rebel, of a child's cleanness to the most loathsome leper, of holiness like that of heaven to the heart set on fire of hell—to lift up the anointed cross, that whosoever looks may live—"in the sight of God to commend yourselves by manifestation of the truth in the conscience of every man." Oh, this is an employment which might well wile a seraph from his brotherhood, and bring the white-robed elders down on swift wings to earth again, low bending before the throne in acknowledgment of the unwonted honour! And this employment is yours and mine. God has counted us worthy, putting us into this ministry. Make full proof of it, I charge you, and let your vows of fidelity be sworn upon the altar to-day.

You are to be men of one theme.—The good old term by which our fathers in the ministry were accustomed to call themselves must apply to you—"Preachers of the Gospel." All your energies are to be bent towards the understanding, that they may be spent in the exposition, of the Bible. The things which you make in your study must be things concerning the King. You are neither to be philosophers, moralists, rhetoricians, nor critics; though philosophy

the subtlest, and morals the most complete, and rhetoric the most telling, and the profoundest criticism, are contained in the message you deliver. You are to be preachers of Christ. If Christ be not in your word, it shall be as the blasted fig-tree on the plain. If Christ be not the all and in all of your utterance, if every sermon does not savour of him, lead to him, glorify him, there will be leanness in your people's souls, and you will lie down at last with the consciousness of wasted labour. Is the world tired, do you think, of the old tidings? Is there any other name before which it will bow the neck of its pride? The apostles might have thought this, when they began in the purple twilight of the Augustan age. Virgil and Horace and Cicero were but recent memories; Philosophy had her schools; Art piled up her magnificent creations; Poetry sang in strains of the most rapturous music. What! tell among these—the refined, the scholarly, the high-born—of the Nazarene and the Crucified! Yes, and nothing else! No conciliation to haughty philosophy, no compromise with pagan prejudice, no admission of Jesus amidst the rabble gods of the Pantheon! The apostles were wiser far than to commit so fatal an error; and the most stalwart of them all declared, with a voice which knew no faltering, and with an eye whose glance swept, like a prophecy, through the centuries to come—"We preach Christ crucified." So must you preach, if you would be wise winners of souls. You are to preach the Gospel of Christ—not a mutilated gospel, not a remote gospel, not a limited and exclusive gospel. Each of these is another gospel which is not the Lord's; and

if you preach another gospel, you do so at the peril of a curse which would scathe the human with an agonised immortality, and involve a seraph in a demon's fall. "If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

You are to be men of one aim.—You are to aim at saving souls. You will be a curse to the church, not of use to it, if you fail in this. If you are satisfied with a good report, with extensive popularity, with **material** prosperity, with a replenished treasury, with deep and **sustained** attention, your estimate of your office is unworthy, and **the sooner** you amend it the better. An orderly service and a wide-spread fame, but Sabbaths without souls, and years without increase—how can you bear it? Look beyond the living phantoms whom you call men, and listen to the naked spirit, lost, it may be, through your neglect, as it wails before the Judge on its sad way to doom. "He prophesied smooth things to us, and daubed over our conscience with untempered mortar; he won us, but he did not warn us; we were charmed, but not convinced under his word; he preached himself, not his Master; to be sure, he told us of a hell, but he spoke so calmly and pleasantly that we thought there could be no danger; he never burned into our hearts the sense of guilt and peril. We are lost, and, alas! our minister cared not for our souls." Brethren, if that accusing voice should fall upon your ears, would you need any other judgment? Would you not sink down abashed and remorseful, as if already blasted by the avenging thunder? My dear brethren, tempt not this complaint

against yourselves. Preach so that if some indifferent hearer straggle into the church, he shall be forced, in spite of himself, to say, "This man is in earnest to save my soul." As to the style of your preaching, I have but little to say. Use the gifts which God has given you, and do not assume the possession, nor strain after the acquirement, of those which he has wisely withheld. It would be a sin against God's beautiful variety to prescribe one ideal for all of you. The brooklet, as it purls and murmurs on its mossy bed, does its work as well as Niagara, with its voice of many waters, or the eternal thunder-peal of the triumphant sea. God has ordained equally the zephyr and the hurricane; and in his own modes of working he shakes into conviction the stronghold of the Philippian jailor's soul, and he opens the heart of Lydia to the truth, as the rose-heart opens to the sun. Put your soul into your style, whatever it is, and you will reach other souls by the blessing of God. Of course you will not descend to become pulpit buffoons, nor savage polemics, nor ecclesiastical posture-masters, nor small dealers in literary millinery; but, according to your cast of mind, you may argue, or expound, or declaim, or depict; and the power may rush through the argument, or lurk in the calm statement of truth, or leap from the eloquent words into the sinner's conscience, or through the picture melt the penitent to tears. Only aim at soul-saving, and God can bless all styles that are simple and natural; but if this aim be wanting, you may be masterly in reasoning as Paul, and tender in persuasiveness as Barnabas, and stern in rebuke as Ezekiel, and gorgeous in imagery as Isaiah,

and your ministry will be soulless and feeble—the sinner's damage, the sorrowing church's pity, and the worldling's utter scorn. Set this before you then, as the life-purpose which you are striving to fulfil: "By all means I will save some. I may not be remembered for my brilliancy, for my scholarship, for the possession of commanding gifts or regal mind—but, God helping me, I will lead sinners to Christ; I will join with the penitent when his sighs burst out in song; I will comfort the troubled soul with the consolations of the Gospel; I will build up the believer, till his faith is strong as the promises of God; I will warn the wicked of the error of his way; I will deliver myself from the guilt of blood."

If this be your resolve, it is easy to prophesy your future. In one sense, it is mercifully hidden from us. We cannot tell who of you will be spared for years of service, and who of you will have his sacrifice accepted in the morning, and be early welcomed and crowned; but your ministry, be it long or short, will be bright and prosperous. You will feel your own helplessness, and will give yourselves continually to prayer. In self-despair you will be driven to a power that is mightier than your own. You will honour the Holy Ghost by seeking his divine baptisms, and he will clothe your word with the unction that is better, as St. Bernard says, "than erudition, or the stores acquired by reading;" constantly realizing the invisible, you will preach as in the sight of God. You will have fruit of your labour, so that, like Bunyan, "you shall count that you have goodly buildings and lordships in the places where your children are born, and you will

be so wrapped up in the glory of this excellent work that you will feel more blessed and honoured of God by this than if he had made you the emperor of the Christian world, or the lord of the glory of the earth without it." Your usefulness will increase with your years, as your experience ripens and your heart gets nearer heaven. You shall lie down calmly on the death-couch, "blessed of the Master when he finds you so doing," and the highest eulogy of language shall be pronounced over your ashes by those who tell of you to the generation following—"He was *faithful* unto death."

"Faithful unto death!" Realize it in its fulness of meaning. See, there is a fair-haired lad just come from his mother's smile, and from the companionship of many friends, into the war. The inspirations of patriotism are upon him, and he is set to bear the flag of his regiment. He bears it with holy pride. It is sacred to him as the gage of love. His highest chivalry, his soul of honour, all his care for the present, all his hope on earth, are bound up with the safety of the flag. The battle rages; fast and thick there flies the murderous hail. Many are borne down by his side; closer comes the shock of the charging foe; hand to hand, and hilt to hilt, they wage the deadly strife; but the banner waves aloft, carried in a hand which knows not to relax its hold. Ha! he reels; he falls; that thrust of the bayonet lets out his young life upon the sword; but ere his fingers stiffen he has tossed the torn flag to his comrades, who bear it proudly from the field; and, watching its safety, a light spreads over the blanched face, and "fires the glazing eye," and you

may catch the last whisper from the hero's lips before they are still for ever: "*I am dying, but I have kept the colours!*" Faithful unto death! Brethren, God gives you a banner that it may be displayed because of the truth. Through evil report and good report, in the breach and in the battle, you are to bear it. However allured, however frightened, however outnumbered, you are to be "valiant for the truth upon the earth." It is your Captain's order that you keep it, and you dare not let it go. Hurt by the archers, bleeding from many wounds, exhausted with the toil of the conflict, you are still to grasp that banner, that so your latest effort may be to transfer it into other hands, torn, but not dishonoured, and to cry, apostle-wise, in dying: "I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day." And, thus faithful unto death, the crown shall not be withheld. You shall stand in the joy of a fulfilled mission before God—waited for at the gate by some loving converts who have gone home before you—and as, in meek and thankful humbleness, you give as the account of your stewardship, "Behold I, and the children whom thou hast given me"—you shall hear the voice long listened for, whose melody is present heaven: "Well done, good and *faithful* servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

XXXIII.

THE SPIRITUAL WANTS OF THE METROPOLIS.

“In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord. Then spake Haggai the

Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king."—HAG. i.

ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and the same divine Spirit who inspired it makes it mighty still. We may find, if we look earnestly and thoughtfully even into those parts which seem barren of teaching for us, guidance in our endeavours to ascertain our duty, rebuke for our slothfulness, or comfort in our trouble. But there is, doubtless, a special fitness in certain parts of Scripture to certain church needs and occasions of particular duty. We are in danger of supposing sometimes that it is from the New Testament that we are to draw all our obligations and motives. Certainly, the supreme prompter in every Christian heart should be the love of Christ; and where there is a due sense of what we owe to him, this will be the motive which transcends all others in its power. But the same Spirit has recorded the Old Testament histories and examples, and we are bound to listen to their teaching. In some sort, it is more proper for us to hearken to the prophets than to the evangelists and apostles, for their times were more like our own, and the condition of the people to whom they ministered was more like also. The churches at Philippi, and Corinth, and Ephesus were composed of converted Pagans—to whom many habits of their olden systems clung—who had come

straight out of darkness into light, who might be expected to bear about with them traces of their ancient error, and who needed to be warned to put off the deeds of darkness, and to be taught, from the beginning, the requirements of the Christian life. The state of those to whom the prophets were sent was very different. They had known the Scriptures from childhood. They had an established church, a ritual appointed by God and honoured by time—written counsel and living teachers on every hand. They did not need, therefore, to be instructed in the wherefore of a duty—to them the elements of truth were clear, the principles of obligation and of obedience were as readily accepted as they were broadly laid down, and it needed but the prophet to remind them that they had failed or sinned, and to scorch them with his rebuke, as with a flame of fire. Our circumstances are the same. We have a church, sanctuaries, ministers, Scriptures, order, life; and, though it is not to rebuke that we are gathered to-night—and if it were, he who speaks has no prophet's authority—it may be that we cannot better serve the high purpose of our meeting, than by an endeavour to bring out in exposition the principles which are suggested in the chapter before us, and then apply them to our present work and need.

With the historical connection of the chapter you are familiar. In the third chapter of the Book of Ezra we have the account of the foundation of the second temple. You remember the mingled feelings with which the stone was laid; how, amid the singing and the shouting of the young—full of hope, and

living in the future, as it is the wont of youth to do—there were sad memories among the chief of the fathers, “because they had seen the first house;” and it was only when the passionate tears had relieved the overcharged heart, that they struggled into sympathy with the joy which the sorrow chastened, and bore their part in the service of the day. The work thus begun was hindered by the opposition of the adversaries, and a decree was obtained from the king that the building should cease. For fifteen years the house of God lay waste, during which time two—if not three—monarchs had reigned and died. The edict which forbade the work of course lost its authority at the death of the king who had issued it, yet the Jews did not resume their labours. They were perhaps discouraged by difficulty, and perhaps restrained by fear. They seem, moreover, to have been intent upon their own comfort and pleasure, for their houses were “ceiled” before God’s. This is the scene which presents itself when the prophet begins his “burden”—the houses of the Jews rising up, terraced and comely; the house of God by their side, a roofless and forgotten ruin.

The prophet begins by an appeal to those in authority. He does not supersede the priest and the governor. He is a special messenger, charged with a special message. He is not to work, but to recall those to duty whose province it is to discharge it. The sin of the Jews, which he is commissioned to reprove, was that they had become indifferent to the building of the temple, and glad of any excuse to forward their own fortunes instead. Hence they said, “The time is not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be

built." It may be readily conceded, that the motives which prompted this delay might not be all sordid and unworthy. The men were few; the work was difficult; the adversaries were subtle, and as malignant of heart as ever. They were not agreed, perhaps, among themselves as to modes of working; they might imagine that when they grew wealthier and more powerful they could build a worthier house, and make better head against the craft and mischief of their enemies. But in God's sight they were guilty notwithstanding.

In the rebuke, which the fourth verse contains, there is this principle laid down—*that God's work should have the first regard in the hearts and lives of his people.* The prophet argues this, and the Lord himself puts the argument into his mouth—"Ye say it is not the time to build the temple, then is it the time to lavish treasure upon yourselves? Ye decorate your own dwellings; ye live in ceiled houses; your children rejoice in riches in their youth; ye withhold not your hearts from any good. Then are you of more account than God? Are curtains good enough for the ark, while you abide in houses of cedar? Is it a time for you to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?"

It is for us to ask, whether we are not chargeable with the same guilt and open to the same reproof and warning. There may be some here who have committed this impiety in its very worst form. God has for years been asking for an entrance into the heart, but you have never opened it. The ceiled house has been full of guests, and there have been the revel and the banquet, but you have never

invited him. In your own nature there have been the materials for building the temple of the Lord, but you have not even begun the work; and angels, as they look at you to-day, and know how you have been spendthrifts of time, and privilege, and grace, see in you, even in your highest earthly dignity, but a splendid ruin—a house of the Lord lying waste. And is it a time to be thus faithless when God's claims are pressed upon you so strongly; when the activity of his enemies demands the firmer loyalty of his friends; when the hours pass away so swiftly; when death standeth at the door? And those of us who have been long known as the Lord's servants, how measured and scanty has been our devotion to his service! If we have not absolutely withheld our hearts from him, and—as the manner of some is—purposed to offer him the refuse of our lives, have we not been sparing of the time we have devoted to his ordinances, of the influence we have exerted for his glory, of the property we have cast into his treasury? Who of us has sought “*first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness?” Who of us has preferred Jerusalem above his chief joy? Who of us, like Solomon, has built God's house before his own, and has let the palace wait until he had dedicated the temple? Brethren, God is jealous still; and if we are conscious of our shortcoming, we must all amend, if we would not betray. There is not an imposture in the world which may not shame us. Those who teach error, those who uphold idolatry, are not to be blamed in this matter. The Paganism of Babylon linked itself with everything in the State, associated common life with idol ceremonies, and gave

its fruitless blessing to the food and wine. The queen of heaven had her untiring worshippers; and, while the men were busy, found some place in her ritual for the women and children. The Roman mint adjoined the temple, and the Pantheon was as crowded as the Forum. There could be no lack of earnest religionism at Athens, when it was "easier to find a god there than a man." Mohammedanism is prodigal of effort, and, if needs be, holds not back even the blood of her sons. Popery impresses the spirit of sacrifice upon her children. Should we be laggard in work and niggard in bounty—we who live in the fulness of time and enjoy the fulness of grace—we to whom is committed a dispensation of such surpassing grandeur? Let our renewed covenant be our answer to-day. Swell forth the utterance with a loud voice and with a glad heart—"My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words."

In the fifth verse, the Lord, by the prophet, urges consideration, and announces *God's sovereignty over temporal affairs and the temporal penalties which he often makes to follow wrong-doing*. "Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." It is a sort of challenge to them to use their highest reason in the matter, to bring the light of experience to bear, and to ask themselves whether they have not suffered, and why all the suffering has come upon them. "Ye are indif-

ferent to God's work;" as if the prophet had said, "Does your own prosper?—a bountiful sowing, but a scanty harvest; a healthy appetite, but insufficient provision; warm clothing, but winter in the bones notwithstanding; the diligence of honest industry—the wages duly paid, and then, as if blown upon by some mysterious breath, vanishing the owner knows not how—these are strange things to happen; they are reversals of accustomed laws. Nature does not usually disappoint those who trust in her. Common wants have generally ample supply. Thrift can manage for the most part to husband what it has earned. 'Consider your ways.' Is there not a cause for this? Does it not suggest the interference of a power mightier than your own? Is there not a curse somewhere mocking the reasonable hope, disturbing the ordinary sequence, constraining the unproductive labour? Can you not trace the connection between blighted harvest and neglected duty; between the substance wasting even in the bags which hold it, and God's house waste because of your criminal sloth, or still more criminal covetousness. Is it worth while for you to contend with God?"

Brethren, God reigns over the universe still. He has not abandoned it to chance, nor even to iron and uncontrolled law. Just as he punished his people in the former times, he can punish the miserly and unfaithful among ourselves. *The poverty which they thought to avoid by not building the temple came upon them BECAUSE they did not build it.* And in the same wise can he make the punishment again kindred to the sin. How soon can he scatter the gathered store,

send mildew into the farmer's fields, and wreck upon the merchant's venture, and panic amid the bourses of the world! Let him breathe upon them—and the finest establishment is a house of cards, and the strongest bonds are as the web of the gossamer, and the millionaire shall come a mendicant to those who once fawned upon his smile, wailing, "Put me, I pray thee, into thine office, that I may eat a morsel of bread." Even if he does not remove the possessions, he can blast the enjoyment of them. He can make the riches to be kept by the owners of them to their hurt; he can smite the body with a malady which wealth shall be profitless to cure. He can make the love of money become a curse so terrible, that the man shall linger through a death-in-life for years, knowing not the rapture of a moment, nor a respite from the pangs of his own fierce and unsatisfied desire. He can let the passions prey upon the wounded spirit, till the man—in the midst of his treasure—starves himself through very dread of poverty, or with cord or pistol ends a life whose burdens he can no longer bear. Men often suffer these things, and blindly endure them—failing to recognise the hand which chastens, and to learn the lessons which the discipline would teach. It were rash and foolish to say that all covetousness or neglect of duty is thus punished. That were to make ourselves interpreters of Providence, to foster a harsh and judging spirit, and tempt "fools to rush where angels fear to tread." It were equally rash to say that God never thus vindicates his claims and his power—both in national judgments and in the losses of individual lot. Not that we may censure others,

but that we may search and prove ourselves, is the book of Providence opened in our sight. We may not brand as sinners above all the Galileans those upon whom the tower of Siloam falls; but when the aphism smites a harvest, or the pestilence decimates a city, it is right to ask, Is there not a cause? When the Chaldeans carry off Job's flocks and herds, and the hurricane destroyeth his children, it is not for us to preach to him sermons which only show our own littleness and pride; but when our own wealth is scattered, or our own darlings die, it will profit us to listen when the Lord speaks, and says—"Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit."

It would not be fitting that the God of mercy should deal only in rebuke and threatening; and accordingly, between the sixth and ninth verses—which reveal the punishment and its cause—there lies the eighth, which commands the labour, and promises the Divine blessing. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord." After the ninth verse the promise is given again, as if Mercy waited upon Justice, to disarm it with her golden words—"Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord."

Thus we gather the third principle of the chapter,

that *God always blesses a work undertaken in his name and for his glory.* In the thirteenth verse he promises his presence during the building of the house—in the eighth verse his blessing when the house is finished—the one to encourage them under the present difficulty, the other to assure them that their labour shall not be in vain. The loving-kindness of this double promise—which may be ours as well as theirs—will appear, if you remember their circumstances. The work was not a holiday labour. In itself it was a great thing for a remnant of the people to do. They were few in number, and not wealthy at the best. Patronage was withheld, and opposition was active. They had to work amid whispering tongues and spiteful souls. Their spirit was subdued by the inevitable depressions of bondage. The future was uncertain. The work, which was costly to begin, and costlier to carry on, might be stopped at any moment—either by royal edict, or by the death of the most active, or the indifference of the least earnest among themselves.

• It was a labour which must be continued for years, so that it could not be carried on by heroic impulse or by momentary enthusiasm. It required firm, hardy, self-denying principle. Now, how should this principle be wrought in them save by the strong faith which always heard the words—“I am with you, saith the Lord.” Enemies round about, a long and difficult work before them, their own hearts failing for fear—what should put them to rest and urge them to diligence but the thought of the Lord’s presence? And when the dreary thoughts came that possibly after all their work might be useless, that the house

might never be dedicated, or might never be accepted, that their indolence had so offended that they had alienated God's favour for ever, that the enemies might prevail against the house again, that in troublous times it might be rased to the ground ere ever it had echoed to a psalm—and these and a thousand like them are thoughts which haunt the manliest in the doing of their holiest deeds—what should better comfort them, hush their unrest, bring a great calm of satisfaction upon their souls, than the words—"I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord"? God is speaking thus to his people still. There is to be pleasure in the work, and pleasure at the end of everything that is done for God. Although we have long delayed to come to his help against the mighty—delayed until he has been obliged to chasten us in very mercy—he will not upbraid us when we repent sincerely, and when fruits meet for repentance are borne. The feeblest shall be made strong by the breath of his inspiration. The most colossal difficulties shall dwindle into smallness. We shall be able to bend circumstances to our purpose, as the pliant osier bends in the skilled workman's hand; and, in spite of the clamour of foes, and the alarm of timid friends, the building shall be furthered, increasing daily in beauty and in strength,

"Till it to a temple rise,
Worthy him who fills the skies."

These are the three great truths which underlie the utterances of the chapter before us—God's work to be the chiefest regard of his people—God's sovereignty

to withhold blessings and inflict penalties when this principle is not acknowledged—God's promise of help and blessing where this principle is witnessed in the life. The effect of the enforcement of these principles upon the remnant of Israel was to rouse them to duty. Their spirits were stirred, as when the clarion inspires the army. They cast off at once the fear which blanched the cheek, and the indolence which weakened the arm, and, with one impulse moved, "they came and did work"—all of them; the young inspiring the old, and the old directing the young; the heads of the Church and of the State toiling in heartiest concord "in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." It is the same result, brethren, which, by the blessing of God, we are wishful that the statement of these principles should produce upon you. You, like the Jews, are but a remnant amongst the mighty people in the midst of whom you live. The work to which you are called is the same—the building of the house of the Lord. The only difference is that we live in another dispensation, in which there is no central temple of worship; and our Jerusalem is so inconceivably vaster than theirs that we must multiply our sanctuaries largely, if we would not have the Lord's house lie waste. Our duty is the same. It is commended to us by sanctions as holy, and enforced by an authority which we may not disregard. The neglect of the past has reproached us, though the motives which compelled it were not all blameworthy. We have penitently acknowledged that we might have done more for God, and we are here to-day to encourage each other in the Lord—to devise liberal

things, to begin anew our bountiful sowing in this enormous field, if haply we may find favour in his sight, and endeavour to undertake in some worthy measure the work which we have arisen to do. I am spared from the necessity of multiplying arguments on behalf of the Society for which I plead—partly, because a very general interest has already been awakened in its favour; and partly, because its admirable report—which I trust is in the possession of most of you, and which I venture to pronounce one of the most remarkable documents ever written in the history of any church—is so exhaustive in its presentation of those facts, which are at once the strongest rhetoric and the most powerful appeal. It is needful only that I should set before you, by way of remembrance, some of those thoughts which invest the Society with such a mighty eloquence of claim.

It is commended by the claim of *religious duty*. On this head I need not enlarge. I have endeavoured to keep the spirit of application present as the principles of the chapter have been expounded, so that you know that of all claims this is the foremost and most binding. Loyal Christian hearts will need no other. It is the will of God that his house should not lie waste; and you, the whole company of the faithful, are bound to see to it that his will be done. There is no excuse from this duty. There is no discharge in this war. Each in his measure: the rich, with their sumptuous tributes; the poor, with their little givings, are to render in the spirit of sacrifice, for the building of the temple of the Lord. It is the will of God that all men should be told

of their sin and of his mercy; he has made them susceptible of being influenced by the tale. He has made them of one blood, on purpose that one heart may speak to another, and that other may not be able to withstand it when the Divine Spirit makes the speaking strong. The plea of Cain is an impious denial of a fact. God *has* made man his brother's keeper. Hence the world is a brotherhood to the man who works for Christ; because he sees, in the most stained, trampled, and godless, the same royal humanity which the Saviour wore, and in which and for which he died. At the call of charity you have been wont to come forward to heal the wounded, or to feed the hungry; here at your very doors is a dreader famine than of the body—a famine of the Word of Life. Arise and build; and as the work goes on, you may vindicate your own zeal, and silence the cavil and the clamour of your adversaries, by the old Crusaders' war-cry—"It is the will of God! it is the will of God!"

It is commended by the claim of *patriotism*. It has been said that the highest life is developed in cities—that amidst their opportunities humanity grows to its tallest intellectual stature, and that from their attritions mind is sharpened into its keenest brightness. Be this as it may, it is certain that the moral nature is in cities exposed to its fiercest trials; and, where the influence of numbers can so easily be realized, the dangers of its perversion become proportionably greater. Where desperate men herd together in masses, they have the greater power of mischief. Hence, if there be no Christian teaching, no leavening of the city with

the hidden virtue of the gospel, there is danger to the commonwealth—danger to peace, character, property, life. A high morality, a healthy public sentiment, is the only political safeguard of a city like London. When the morals of Paris became infamous, it was a short stride to the first Revolution. It is for the weal of the State, then, to multiply your temples of worship, where the rich are taught to be lowly, and the poor to be contented, where each is reminded that he has duties as well as rights, and where the altar is shown to be the surest safeguard to the throne. And this is not a matter to which the provinces should be indifferent. It has been acutely said, that “France is the nation of a great city, but that London is the city of a great nation.” Everywhere, to the farthest verge of the green isles, there are relations with London. The pulse of home beats throughout. The provinces send up of their fairest, of their most gifted, in ceaseless immigration; and the reaction is almost equal, for it is said to be rare to meet with a Londoner of the third generation. The fortunes made there are spent in the country; and thus the mighty tide of life, though there are not always the same individual waves, is ceaseless in its ebb and flow. Brethren, I commend to you the work of this and like societies for your country’s sake. The truest “substance” of the land is “the holy seed.” Let the Word of God sound out in your streets. Get your youth impressed with the power of the Gospel. You will do your country a better service than to line her fields with armies, or to make her seaboard bristle with cannon. You will raise up for her a defence

surer than that of crag or bastion—you will girdle her round with a rampart of sanctified mind.

It is commended by the claim of *numbers*. The field of its work is London—a name which is on the lips of a world. We are apt to talk loosely about London as a great city, and we have thought, perhaps, until we have been bewildered, upon its size and endlessness; upon its startling contrasts of wealth and want, of ostentation and outlawry, of charity and crime. But how few of us have any definite idea of the mass of our fellows who are daily living, hoping, toiling, suffering, and dying within the 120 square miles of which London is composed! “A city?” says a noted French writer—“No, it is a province covered with houses.” And this is feeble to express its greatness, for there are twice as many souls in London as in the largest division of France, and a quarter of a million more than in the most crowded county of England. Five times more populous than New York, four times more populous than St. Petersburg, twice more than Constantinople, having two-thirds more inhabitants than Paris, and one-fourth more than even the hiving multitudes of Pekin—the mind fails to comprehend it, the brain recoils from the contemplation of the sum. How shall we get to understand it? Weigh it with kingdoms. The Kings of Hanover, and Saxony, and Wurtemberg, do not, either of them, reign over as many subjects as our Queen rules in this her chief city of London. Try it by its own growth. We do not ask you to go back to the time when Druids drank at the Wallbrook, and when the Fleet—one of the common sewers of your

drainage now—was a rushing water in which Saxons were baptized, and on whose bosom floated navies of merchantmen. Come to later times. When John Wycliffe lived—a light shining in a dark place—there were not so many people in all England, by half a million, as will sleep to-night in London. Gauge it by the accommodation which it provides, or which it fails to provide. There are every night homeless ones wandering through its streets, or huddling to its refuges of charity, equal to the population of many a thriving village, and of more than one Parliamentary borough; while, if the houses which hold its population were put side by side, you would have one continuous street, with the tenants at one end listening to the chimes of York Minster, and the tenants at the other end slumbering under the shadow of the Pyrenees. Think of it by its periodical increase. If it were supposable that all who come into London in a year were to be drafted thither from one place, then Guernsey would be like Tyre in her ruin, “desolate, and without inhabitant;” the lovely Isle of Wight would in two years be an Eden with scarce an Adam to till it, and several Scottish shires would have their broad acres cleared, one after another, as effectually as feudal laird could wish. Conceive it by its daily waste and supply. Every eight minutes throughout every day of every year a soul departs out of London to its account before the Great Judge; but the havoc of death is more than neutralized by the greater marvel and activity of life, for in every five minutes in some London household a child is born. And finally—to bring home to you the vastness of this little world—

remember, that out of every thousand people the great world has in it two of them are Londoners, and that, if its inhabitants were drawn up in marching order, walking two and two, the line would stretch for 670 miles, and at the speed of three miles an hour it would be nine days and nights before the last of the long procession had swept by. And it is *this* London for which we plead—vast, bewildering, terrible—with a hum and tramp of sound which deafen us, but which swell up to God—a voice of wickedness which asks for “a cry against it”—a voice of need which yearns for a succour that it cannot find—a voice of sorrow wailing before the All-Merciful One, which surely moves his heart to say, as erst of Nineveh—“Should I not spare that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand?”

It is commended by the claim of *need*. It is to be regretted that that high party-feeling, which hinders so many good things, should have prevented the taking of religious statistics in the census of 1861. Doubtless, there were errors both of suppression and of exaggeration in the former returns; but they furnish an amount of information proximately true, which is of no common value. It is computed that the greatest number, who are at any one time able to attend public worship, is 58 per cent. of the population. Dr. Chalmers, writing from Scotland, where attendance on worship is hereditary, supposes $62\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Mr. Baines, writing of the manufacturing districts, argues that provision for 50 per cent. would fully meet the need. It would be safe to affirm that the mean of

58 per cent. would be a proper basis of calculation ; and that—after making allowance for infants and invalids, and those who attend to them, and all others whom occupation or distance deprive of the opportunity—58 per cent. of the population, both in city and country, might be present in the public worship of God. At the census of 1851, there were *two millions of the people who could not, if they had desired it, have found room to worship in comfort in any church or chapel in the land* ; and as the erection of places of worship has hardly kept pace with the increase of the population, it may be presumed that the same deficiency of provision exists still.

In London—inclusive of the city, where the provision is in excess of the requirement—only 29 persons out of every 100 could hear the Word of Life. Out of 50 of the most destitute districts, no fewer than 30 are in London ; and the conclusion of Mr. Horace Mann, who made the able and painstaking digest of the returns, is that 2000 additional places of worship must be built in London to overtake what is the admitted and terrible necessity of to-day. This, moreover, taking no account of the increase of population, of the opening up of new neighbourhoods, and of that wonderful spirit of progress of which no prophet can prophesy the end. Bear with the mention of these figures ; stern and dry as they seem, they are on this subject the most passionate eloquence. I have given you the general want of London as it appeared to one who wrote for the nation, and who was obliged, therefore, to hold the balance fairly, and to indicate no suspicion that any teaching might possibly be in error ;

but there are many questions involved in the subject which, viewing it in the light which our own church will shed upon it, make the need more intense and appalling. There is touched, for instance, the question whether attendance once a day is to be considered satisfactory. We need not spend time in the discussion of that. It has been said of us, that there was the tendency among our wealthier members to glide into this habit. I believe it to be false, and therefore rank it among the thousand other libels which have been invented to our damage. If I believed it to be true, I should deplore it as a source of spiritual feebleness, whose results can be only evil. Then we are bound to remember, that when it is estimated that 29 per cent. of the population of London are provided for in existing places of worship, all denominations are included; and there are some of them to whose teaching we object—not only that it fails in our judgment to supply the need, but that it makes the need more fearful, and, in itself, constitutes one of the weightiest arguments for missionary faith and zeal. There are the Jews, who reject the Saviour, for whom we have need to pray that they may “look in penitence” on him whom they pierced in fury. There are the followers of the Mormon imposture—that faint lunar reflection of the gigantic and grand imposture of Mohammed. There are the amiable, intelligent, orderly, but—as we deem them—fearfully mistaken Socinians, who deny the divinity of our blessed Lord, and thereby rob his atonement of all its efficacy and power. There are the Romanists—deluded by a system of cumbrous superstition—against

whose activity we have reason to watch, and for whose conversion to a purer faith it is meet that we should labour and pray. There are others whose religious eccentricities it does not need that we should mention, but whom we may not recognise as teachers of the way to heaven. These, in the return we have mentioned, provided for at least 6 per cent. of the population of London. By so much, therefore, does our responsibility enlarge and deepen. Fidelity constrains me to go further. I desire to commit no man by the testimony which it is on my conscience to bear. I rejoice right heartily in the increased activity and effort which, mainly through the means of the earnest man who presides over this diocese, have been put forth by the Established Church in London. In all the churches newly built there will be truth in the Liturgy; in many of them I am sure there will be truth from the pulpit; but when I know that, without let or hindrance, and sheltered under legal decision, I may listen to teachings as wide asunder as the poles—that here I may find observances which common men think to be Popish, and there I may hear utterances which common men think to be infidel—I confess it lessens my gladness, and fills my spirit with a feeling that is akin to fear, and increases my anxiety that from lips that can utter no uncertain sound, there should be blown the trumpet in Zion.

Let me not be mistaken. I am not foolish enough to believe that my church can do all the work, nor that, if it could, it would be desirable. As there are varieties in the beauties of nature, so Chris-

tianity can suit itself to every type of mind and character. I am a Methodist, and therefore I am glad of the prosperity of all who are labouring for Christ. I have no quarrel with denominationalism in the abstract. In the present state of society, I believe it not only to be inevitable, but to be good. I have no sympathy with the exclusiveness of those who profess to have outgrown the sects, but who are really the narrowest of them all. I believe they are both at home and abroad unconscious enemies of the truth they wish to spread. The zealous efforts of the parish clergyman; the labours of evangelical Nonconformists; the newly awakened and praiseworthy zeal of our Presbyterian friends; the godly exertions of those who have branched off from ourselves—I hail them all with a brother's heart. I bid God-speed to them all; but I speak among my own people. I am a Methodist, not merely by descent, but by intelligent preference, and by a strong conviction, which is rooted more deeply every day—that the church to which I belong is called to be a power in the world. Not in vaunting, not certainly in unfriendliness, but in the calm and temperate assertion of our own rights and duties, I press upon you the special obligation which rests upon you as Methodists, to gird yourselves afresh for this your work in London. I believe your obligation to be special. Surely this will not give offence to any. I am hearty in my acknowledgment of the mission of other churches. My co-operation with their enterprises of faith has ever been warm and willing. But here, on our own ground, in this dear old chapel—hallowed by the memorials of our dead fathers—bright

with the energy and hope of us their sons—I do not err, when I affirm that I believe our church is under special obligations to share, and that not meanly, in the work of building houses for the Lord.

I do not rest the speciality of this duty upon our valuable organization, though I believe we have a church order as effective as the most orderly, and a church life as vigorous as the freest—restraint, almost to tyranny, in every tendency to do evil; but liberty, almost to licence, in every endeavour to do good. I rest it mainly upon the testimony which I believe we are especially raised up to bear. Here, again, let me not be mistaken. I call no man dishonest who differs from me. I should think it a great sin to do so, even though I cannot understand the logical consistency of his position. These are not times to embitter old controversies, nor to embarrass the movements of conscientious men; and the longer I live, the less am I disposed to call down fire from heaven upon those against whose teaching I am bound to protest, or even upon those whose practices I view with loathing; but, for myself I say, I could not preach the Gospel frankly if I believed that there was a solitary man to whom I preached it who had not power to receive its message, and I should lose heart in my work if I believed the Gospel to be a failure, and that the Saviour must become again incarnate to accomplish the work in which God the Holy Ghost has failed. Now the witness which your ministers bear is free from these errors, which, I believe, mark, in their measure, the comeliest exhibitions of truth. They are hampered neither by a limited redemption, nor by a narrow

Millenarianism. They neither cramp the atonement of the divine Saviour, nor discrown the royalty of the divine Spirit. They go to every man, however far he may have wandered, and cheer him with the hope of mercy; they preach salvation, the freest, the heartiest, the fullest; salvation to those who have sinned the longest and the most vilely; to those of whom reformatories have despaired, and whom civilisation and philanthropy have alike passed by. It is this ample Gospel, this preaching of present salvation, so suitable to the needs of men who have a great work to do, and a short time in which to do it, which constitutes their power, and which impresses the more solemn responsibility upon you.

There is adaptation between the end and the means—such as can be found in the same degree in no other church in the land. And there is not only adaptation, but there is desire. The people hunger, and they say, when their wants are once supplied, “Evermore give us this bread.” It is fitted equally for all—the East, with its streets of outlaws, and its dens of thieves, and withal its swarth and hardy mechanics, who are the sinew of the land—the West, with its bustle and gaiety—the suburban peoples, with means less straitened, but with souls as precious—there is something in this testimony which reaches and can save them all. Hence, where new ground has been broken up, we have no cause to complain of the result. The congregations are ready for the sanctuaries. The people wait for the Word. They are “made willing in the day of God’s power.” And there are not only fitness and desire, but, in many

cases, kindred ; they are our own children, who famish for lack of spiritual bread. Some of them have come up from godly country homes, and have got lost in the great city ; but there are memories at their heart, which long sorely to be quickened by the voices familiar to their childhood. Some of them have grown rich and indifferent ; they have not remembered to look for an altar when they looked for a house. Some have wandered into the world's gaieties and heartlessness ; and, if they could but see themselves, they might wail out, in sad reversal of the plaint of ancient Israel, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down ; yea, we wept, for we have *forgotten* Zion."

Brethren, it is true. They are in the midst of you—thirty thousand of them, at one time or other in our own church-fellowship ; some folded in other churches, because you gave them no pasture ; most of them "wandering in the wilderness, in a solitary way, and finding no city to dwell in." Adaptation, desire, kindred—can the claim of need be stronger ? And there are sixty-six sub-districts of London, each with a population of more than ten thousand souls, in each of which, probably, you have a portion, but in none of which you have a memorial. Brethren, this state of things must not continue ; this reproach must be wiped away. If this society is not large enough, we must create another—upon a wider basis and with larger aims. We must be delivered from blood-guiltiness, or the curse of the God we have neglected will cleave to us, and a heavier wrath will descend upon our heads. I call on you to avert this doom "for Zion's sake." Who of you will be callous to

the plea? "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."

Brethren, I have done. Unfeignedly have I desired to be released from this service, and that the work which I have tried to do should have been done by abler hands. I have striven to say what I had to say in the fewest and in the plainest words; I have not considered that I was called to preach a sermon so much as to bear a testimony. But, if there be truth in my words—and I speak them with a conviction of their truth which is both deep and solemn—then give me my reward. Come forth to grapple with this great work, and in the strength of God to overcome it; remembering his gracious words, which still sound like music in the intervals of storms—"I am with you, saith the Lord." "I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified."

XXXIV.

CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another : and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”—MAL. iii. 16, 17.

THE ancient Rabbis call Malachi “the seal of the prophets ;” but, for the most part, so sad are his words and so stern, that he has been well called “a mourning seal”—a seal affixed to a letter which contains intelligence of death. The latest of the seer’s noble race—flourishing alone with no helpers to share his burden—destined to have no successor for four hundred years—there is a melancholy suggestiveness about both his person and his book. Through the dreary interval of years he gazes wistfully ; and his heart grows strong as he discerns—though at so great a distance—first the forerunner, and then the Strength of Israel. The Old Testament finishes with a curse ; and that curse rolled along the faint heart of the world until, four hundred years after, it opened its eyes, glad and wondering, upon “the book of the generation of Jesus Christ.” The prophet’s sole consolation, apart from this hope of the Messiah, seems to have been in the godly remnant, who, by the very abounding of

iniquity around them, had been united into closer compactness and more endearing bonds of brotherhood. In this third chapter he sketches rapidly and terribly—in the seventh verse, the rebellion—in the eighth, the sacrilege—and in the thirteenth, the infidelity of the people; and then, as if intimating that the faithful who would retain their fidelity found it absolutely necessary for their very life to associate together, that they might be encouraged and fortified in this day of rebuke and blasphemy, he says—"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another:"—were constant and zealous in Christian communion—"And the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." The text is an evident and happy illustration of the advantages of Christian fellowship, and as such we purpose for awhile to dwell upon it this morning. It would appear that, in the olden time—and in this respect "that which hath been is now"—Christian fellowship, or the Communion of Saints, was

I. Commonly practised.

II. Divinely noticed.

III. Blessedly rewarded.

I. One great purpose of the Saviour's incarnation, and of the call and authority of his disciples, was to establish a Gospel church. "Upon this rock"—that is, on the foundation truths of Christ's divinity and sacrifice which had been embodied in Peter's confession of faith—"Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The

spread of the Gospel, its triumph over opposing error, and its lodgment in the hearts of those who embraced it, is told us in these words : " And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved ;" and the ordinary and normal routine of the Christian life in apostolic days—yet uncorrupted by any nascent error—is set forth in the primitive picture : " And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." The word " church " in the Bible is sometimes used in a grand, and sometimes in a restricted sense—sometimes to denote an assembly meeting for ecclesiastical purposes, and in a visible form ; and sometimes to signify the vast thronging company of the faithful, who, in all lands and ages, should be united to Christ their Head. If I speak of a member of the church in its real and inner significance, I speak of a spiritual man, apart altogether from any organized or mechanical idea.

The central thought—the great necessity of churchmanship—is union with Christ, participation in the benefit of his dying, transformation through the influence of his Spirit. But this spiritual change is effected in human hearts. Human hearts have in them chords of sympathy and a strong social instinct, so that, by inevitable and congenial affinity, like will yearn for like. The Lord's freeman will not company with slaves, but will search round him for his fellows in the new enfranchisement. Hence arises organization—the gathering together of those who think alike, who acknowledge the same supreme obligation, who are inspired by the same majestic hope, and who

travel to the same assured and glorious recompense of reward. This union of believers, for purposes of mutual spiritual blessing, constitutes the visible church. The apostle, in one passage, recognises the existence of this union, and speaks of the love which it engenders as the true test of a converted heart—"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

It is obvious, from the general recognition of this union throughout the New Testament, that the apostles never thought of reducing it to a mere matter of duty, enforced by direct and imperative precept. They looked at it in another light. They regarded it as a social necessity—as the spontaneous development of nature's law. Nature craves for companionship. In all her moods, and in all her conditions, she dreads the utter loneliness. Her bounding joy is not complete unless another share it. Her deep sorrow loses, in the presence of sympathy, much of the sharpness of its pang. Her enterprise is stimulated by numbers into braver heroism. Even amid the rapturous conditions of Paradisaic existence, "it was not good for man to be alone;" and the innate sociality of man has prevailed ever since the fall, both in the association of the good, and in the unholy leagues of evil. The visible church, therefore, is the supply of a great want of nature; and church fellowship has been divinely appointed to realize the strong instinct of universal brotherhood.

But Christianity is the religion of intellectual freedom. Resting upon evidence, and presenting itself free from all disguises for the scrutiny of men, it

trammels no man's intellect, and secures the right of private judgment unto all. It is manifest that, even among those who are substantially agreed upon the cardinal doctrines of Christianity, there may be many minor differences of opinion—differences of political theory or theological dogma, diverse technicalities of phrase, diverse institutions, diverse plans of action, Here again, in minor assimilation, the same social law operates—combining into closer union those of similar preference for the maintenance of each other's faith, and for the more effectual out-working of their plans of holy toil. Hence arises the denomination—an inner circle within the church—not unwarranted, nor contrary to Scripture, because it springs from the genius of Christianity, and is an almost necessary adjunct of a free church life. Denominations, therefore, though they should not be needlessly multiplied, and though they should keep Divine charity at the heart of them all, are not in themselves evil. They are not incompatible with the most essential and catholic unity. They may be but the graceful varieties of nature, subsidiary to, and promotive of, her grand and central harmony—the prismatic colours, preserving their individual distinctness, and yet melting softly into each other, to form the brilliant arch which spans with its promise the clouded destiny of the world. The church is the temple; the denominations are the courts of the temple; but they all have common festivals of worship, and common access into the Holiest through the sprinkling of the blood. We must take care to distinguish rightly as to the relative importance of the two. The sect is but a satellite;

the church is the many-starred system ; the throne of God is the central and all-attractive sun.

Perhaps there may be some here who need to be reminded, that membership in a denomination does not necessarily imply membership in Christ's church. It is quite possible to seek the fellowship of God's people from unworthy motives, and to retain it long after the life—of which it is the expression—has died out of the soul. In olden time, when the sword was bared against the faithful—when carbine's flash and blood-hound's bay were no infrequent accompaniments of their hurried worship—attachment to the church was a presumptive evidence of sincerity. But now, religion is a passport to employment and a certificate of honour, and there is no stringent and conclusive test to separate the precious from the vile. But it is a perversion of the design, both of the church and of the sect, to hold unconverted persons in communion—unless, indeed, they manifest, by consistent and earnest endeavour, a desire “to flee from the wrath to come.” The sect may be a hospital, in which the wounded and ailing are tended by the skilful and strong. It should never be a necropolis ; nor even a plague-swept city, where living and dead crowd in unheeded contact.

Brethren, do I speak to any to-day, whose dependence for eternal safety is in their union with the fellowship of saints ? who deem themselves safe because they are separated ? and who indulge in covetousness, or selfishness, or pride, or worldly-mindedness—those sins of the heart of which human law takes no cognizance, and which even church

discipline has no gauge to estimate and no power to punish? You are grievously in error; and there is a hazard and a peril about your condition, which are terrible to think upon. Without personal consecration, and the daily watchfulness and prayer and effort of the Christian life, church membership is valueless as the flowers that are strewed upon a corpse. It will be a fearful thing, if, from the fellowships of the sanctuary, you pass down into the fellowships of the pit—if, with the cry of "Lord, Lord," upon your lips, you wail it, not in the prayers of the pious, but among the perditions of the lost for ever.

I am hardly prepared to endorse the converse statement to the one I have just advanced—that membership in Christ's church does not necessarily imply membership in some one or other of its visible branches. I would not declare it to be, in the abstract, impossible for a man to receive the grace of God, and to retain it, in isolation from all Christian fellowship until he die; and then, through the merits of the Saviour, to be admitted into heaven. But I do say, that such an one puts his salvation into very imminent peril; and that for one who holds fast, there are a thousand who "cast away their confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." If you will only think of it, there are many important considerations which urge the desirableness, if not the necessity, of union with the people of God—considerations relating both to the maintenance of religion in the soul, and to its proper exhibition before men.

One purpose which seems essentially involved in the possession of spiritual Christianity is the bearing

witness for Christ. Those who, by the gift of the Holy Ghost, are clad in spiritual power, are thus made mighty that they may be "witnesses unto God." This would seem to necessitate an organized system of testimony. The witness cannot be fully given either in the words of acknowledgment, or in the deep heart-affection which prompts to the holy life. There must be palpable and public dedication—not only the understanding enlightened and the heart transformed, but new companionships to supersede the old—not only the head filled with the truth and the heart warmed with its omnipotence of love, but the hand cordial in its grasp and greeting for those who have received like precious faith and power. Disciples of the spirit of Nicodemus—with less excuse than he—may endeavour, under the shadows of the night, to come to Jesus; but their cowardice dishonours the Master, and enfeebles their own souls. Though the spirit of active persecution slumbers, no age of the world will be without its "Pharisees" who hinder; and the brand were as disgraceful now, as when it was originally affixed upon the recreant hearts of old—"Among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." In some great rallying-time of patriotism, the trusted men are not those who trim between opposing parties as the balance of interest inclines, and whose defection would surprise neither the one nor the other. In some Thermopylæ of a nation's liberties, or some Marathon of its triumph, they are the crowned if they

live; and, if they fall, are inurned amid a country's tears, who "look proudly to Heaven from the death-bed of fame." There is no armour for the back in the Christian's panoply divine; and they are the trusted soldiers in Immanuel's army, who are not stragglers on a foray, nor free-lances in a guerilla warfare, but resolute bands in the sacramental host which is marshalled for the conquest of the world.

Another thing which seems to necessitate church membership is respect for the memory of Christ, and for the ordinances which he appointed of perpetual obligation in his church. His object was to separate a people, not merely as the recipients of his truth, but as the instruments of its extension—at once, its depository and its herald. He appointed moreover initiatory and confirmatory Sacraments—Baptism as the gate of entrance—the Eucharist as the banquet of the faithful, and as the renewal of the consecrating vow. With reference especially to the Sacrament of the Supper, they who love the Saviour will not hold this—his ordinance—in disesteem. They will observe it with reverent affection; will feel in each refreshing celebration as if the scene of Tabor was renewed; and will therefore not dishonour his precious dying request, by refusing to commemorate him in the mystery of bread and wine. But the Sacraments are dispensed in the church, and in the church only. They are the rights and privileges of citizens and freemen, to which serfs and aliens have no claim. They are the bequeathments of family inheritance, which may not be shared by the stranger—"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood

of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" If then a man professing to be a Christian is identified with no company of Zion's travellers—if, as a venturesome Bedouin or desert wayfarer, he follow the usual habits of the wandering tribes—eating his morsel alone, slaking his thirst at some spring of his own discovery which he keeps carefully hidden—holding aloof from the caravans which pass him in the distance, or approaching them only for purposes of attack—he may say he is free, perhaps, and unrestrained, and independent. But his freedom is that of the hermit, made up in equal parts of superstition and of pride—his unrestrainedness is but a condition of barbarism—and his independence is that of the wild beasts' brotherhood; which, though it be of a lordly lion, is but the brotherhood of the brute after all.

Brethren, if it be—as it is—a *command* of the Lord Jesus to his followers to "show forth his death until he come," then they are verily guilty, who—with opportunities of testimony and privilege—refuse to avail themselves of them, and so neglect the ordinances of the Lord; or, with haughty preference, choose among the commandments of his Word. It is impossible to avoid this conclusion; I press it home upon you now. Ask yourselves, I pray you, when next you turn away from the table of the Lord—or when, partaking of the holy emblems, you feel that inasmuch as you are not in the church (in any branch of the church) you are there by sufferance, and not by right—ask yourselves, whether this is not just the one thing lacking to perfect your Christian decision.

Again, the church exists for purposes of spiritual aggression. She is to preach the gospel of the kingdom for a witness unto all nations. The apocalyptic angel, flying through the midst of heaven, is the emblem of her activity of zeal. She has had a banner given to her, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Disregarding hazard, her messengers must traverse perilous seas, and breathe in sultry air. Heedless of difficulty, she must press to the fulfilment of her mission with an ardour which no despondency can overweigh, and which no multiplication of disaster can crush from its elasticity of soul. It is manifest that this work—to which its charter of incorporation binds it—can be accomplished only by associated efforts. A solitary voice, unless charged with power by special delegation from on high—as was that of Jonah in the streets of Nineveh—would be lost in the world's vast expanse, and awake not even the echoes in answer. *Many* must run to and fro with the same evangel-tidings, if the dead valley is to be roused to life and the slumbering bones to start up—an army of breathing men. And “how shall they preach except they be sent?” and who are to send them, if there be no organization of believers, no thrilling sympathy—pulsing from a central heart through every fibre and sinew of the frame? If *you* may be exempted from the duty of church communion, others may be similarly free. There is no speciality in your case which others might not plead. Then, by and by, the dislocated body of Christ—torn by intestine strife, bleeding from many wounds, vacillating in resistance, and powerless for conquest—might dwindle into countless attenua-

tions and languish and die. The call of Christian enterprise binds you to "speak often one to another." It is your duty to avow yourselves of the church rather than of the world; and to throw in whatever you possess of energy, and influence, and zeal, with one or other of the troops which are displaying the common standard of the cross. For this cause also I call you into church fellowship to-day. Not that the work will cease, or the victory be doubtful, if you do not join. You are of infinitely less importance to the church, than the church is to you. The work will succeed whether you help or hinder; but, if you will, you may be honoured by the partnership. The Saviour will conquer the world, whether you are a soldier in his army or a deserter from his cause. But, if you will, you may be crowned in the triumphal procession; and surely that is better than to be dragged at the chariot-wheels. Now, by this combination of motive—by the duty of bearing witness for Christ—by respect for his ordinances and affection for his memory—by the world's wants and the church's work, needing the concentrated and collective effort of all Christian people—I call upon you to stand no longer on the threshold, but to identify yourself—heart and hand—with the armies of the spiritual Israel.

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." Mark who those are whom we thus invite into the church—"they that *feared* the Lord"—not with the terror with which the vassal croucheth to the tyrant, but with the reverence with which the child waits upon the Father. The fear of the Lord is

conservative and tendeth to safety—is vigilant and watches against the first abhorred approach of ill—is consistent and in all vicissitude, whether circumstances frown or smile, whether sin is difficult or can be committed with impunity, preserves its equal recognition of the great Invisible—is brave, and alike in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, or Darius' den, or Herod's dungeon, or Nero's presence-chamber, flinches not from its strong-souled and fearless heroism ; and this fear of the Lord is the characteristic quality of his chosen people.

“And that thought upon his name.” They have the sublimest subject of contemplation. “His name” —boundless Power —eternal right —wisdom that cannot err and needs not to amend its plans—truth dazzling in its lustrous brightness—goodness essential and rejoicing in its own manifestations—love, fathomless, unsearchable, draining its own heart and pouring out its life-blood in sacrifice for the lost world—these are the glorious letters which spell out “his name ;” and upon these they think and ponder, intenter than rapt student of the mysteries of Isis—more absorbed than decipherer of cabalistic lore. “That thought upon his name ;” and by the thought were lifted from the common to the royal, were enraptured and transformed ; “that thought upon his name,” until they heard it inspoken, and their whole being thrilled beneath the syllables of its grace and power—“merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth ;” “that thought upon his name,” until, assimilated by the wondrous meditation, they felt the fingers of the forming hand writing it upon their own

hearts—the new name—and rejoiced, in *that*, their second and inner christening, “with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

Have you, brethren, in possession these qualifications, or are you seeking them in diligent and earnest search? Then “come with us and we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” We invite you on the assumption that, by your hatred of sin and your desire for pardon and holiness, you are seeking to “flee from the wrath to come.” We ask not you—the careless—nor you, the selfish—nor you, the formalist—nor you, the profane. Alas! that we have such hearers in the house of the Lord. Your adhesion to us would only bring the plague into our borders; and the union of the church, if such were its members, would be but the union of the sepulchre—where all is quiet enough and brotherly—but *dead*. We wish your welfare dearly, and yearn over you with tenderest yearning; but we dare not ask you into our fellowship as you are. There can be no deadlier curse than an unconverted church. Come to Christ. Realize salvation through him—or even seek it with earnestness and tears—and we will receive you with open arms, and summon the angels, who are more skilled in minstrelsy than we, to lead off the thanksgiving-hymn over the returning prodigal.

But there are some—nay, many—in our congregations, who are serious, and thoughtful, and decided for the Lord’s service, but who have not yet grasped, with the warm clasp of alliance, the hand of the church—and it is to them we make our appeal. What are your objections? Let us hear them. “Professors are

so inconsistent ; they do not live out their profession ; so many of them are frail and erring, and bring disgrace upon the cause they espouse." It is unhappily too true. We are not what we ought to be—that is certain. But there is the greater need for you amongst us, who see the danger so clearly, and would, by your own consistent living, do much to remedy the evil. If you are waiting for a perfect church, we despair of being able to accommodate you. None of the seven churches of Asia would avail for your lodgment—for there was something against them all. The church at Corinth must shut her doors, for there were carnal walkers in her midst. Nay, even the primitive apostles would fail to furnish you with a fellowship sufficiently holy—for Peter was recreant, and James ambitious, and Jude, his brother, inquisitive, and John hot-tempered, and Thomas unbelieving—not to mention Judas the betrayer. To urge this objection is but a shallow evasion of a plain duty, which sincerity will not urge, and which candour should blush to name. "But the church is so divided. There are so many different and often warring sects—I know not which to choose." Yes—you do. You know that which is the nearest to your convictions—which touches your heart-strings with a warmer preference—where you can find what seems to you practice the most accordant with New Testament teaching. You know which you prefer ; and if I were not closely and personally pressing you, you would be fluent to tell it. I want—again I declare it—to make no proselytes. I would not descend from my high vantage-ground on so mean an errand. This pulpit is my throne ; and, as a king,

I should demean my dignity were I to make a raid upon the subjects of another. But I do adjure you to preserve this neutrality no longer—for neutrality now is opposition. If you are not Christ's servants, you are Christ's foes. Some of you have accorded to us your free, voluntary, intelligent preference. You are haunted by no scruples as to the soundness of our doctrines, or the validity of our ordination. "If we are not apostles unto others, yet doubtless we are to you; for the seal of our apostleship are ye in the Lord." Then come into our church. We are glad to see you in the sanctuary; but we want more—we want the lifelong intercourse, the active hand, the sunny smile. It is cold work, standing outside—'mid stormy skies and in inclement weather. Come to the hearthstone, where the household lamp is lighted, and the fire is brightly kindled, and the loving family gathers. You will not find elsewhere greener pastures, nor stiller waters, nor a more rich and resting influence of God—than we enjoy. Therefore, "come with us and we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

XXXV.

THE ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE.

“For thou desirest not sacrifice ; else would I give it : thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”—Ps. li. 16, 17.

HOW marvellous is the adaptation of the Scripture to the race for whom it has been revealed ! In its pages all the conditions of human experience are reflected, as in a mirror, and in its words every plaint and struggle of the heart can find appropriate expression. It is absolutely inexhaustible in its resources for the conveyance of the deepest feeling into language. It puts a music into the speech of the tuneless, and rounds the periods of the unlettered with an eloquence which no orator can rival. It has martial odes to brace the warrior's courage, and gainful proverbs to teach the merchant wisdom. All mental moods can represent themselves in its aptitude of words. It translates the doubts of the perplexed, and articulates the cry of the contrite ; fills the tongue of the joyous with carols of thankful gladness, and “gives sorrow words, lest grief, that does not speak, should whisper the o'erfraught heart, and bid it break.” Happy we, my friends, who, for all the varieties of our religious life,

have "this man of our counsel" divinely provided to our hand.

The psalm before us has been called by common consent a penitential psalm; and where did ever penitence find readier utterance for its sorrow? Am I addressing any one to-night who has been roused to a consciousness of his life's dark mystery of sin—on whom there rests a shadow and a fear, and a sense of unsettled controversy, and a feeling of the possession of a nature warped sadly from its original? Is there a trouble within any soul before me, because of an immortality which it feels to be both prisoned and polluted—because of a holy ideal from which it feels itself divorced—because of a God in whom it ought to rejoice, but from whom it has become hopelessly alien? Do those longings and listenings, of which you are thoughtfully conscious, pant and struggle for expression? My brother, in this psalm there is the anatomy of a heart which has feared and bled like thine; there is all the process of thine own mental perplexity; all thy transitions are recorded there. The heart is agonized, imploring, satisfied. There is the wail—the hush—the thank-song—the far descent into the depths—the joyous mounting upon the crest of the wave—the frantic flight from the old city of Destruction—the clear sight of Heaven from the Delectable Hill. It is impossible for you to fail to trace and to be comforted by the analogy. The same grace which pardoned the transgressions of the royal sinner, and filled him with satisfaction and with rest—that same grace is available for you.

The occasion of the psalm is said to be the mourn-

ing of David under the searching rebukes of Nathan the prophet, for his sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. In its structure, it is divided into two parts—the first twelve verses being one continued litany, urged in every variety of importunate entreaty—the last seven containing the record of his vows, and anticipating the doxology which his recovered heart would sing, and the acts of personal and official consecration in which his restored spirit would perpetuate its praise.

The first fact which is implied in the whole composition is the fact of *sin*. This is the basis alike of the confession and of the entreaty. There must have been in the psalmist's spirit not merely a general sense of wrong-doing, and a dread recollection of estrangement, but the burden of present condemnation, and the presentation of some particular sin. Such plaintive melodies were never struck from angel harps; the blessed ones who kept their first estate never sang such deprecating minstrelsy. From the beginning to the end there is the record of the *sinner's* miseries, and the supplication of the *sinner's* prayers. There was prayer, doubtless, in Eden, in its two elements of adoration and of thanksgiving; but there was no such prayer as this. It was depravity, with its sad heritage of loss and shame, which "infused a new property into our wants, and invented a numberless range of its own." There is alienation which must be transformed into confidence—sin which needs to be forgiven—remorse of conscience which must be chased away—anticipation of torment which must be exchanged for a prospect of blessedness—a dark and blighting curse which must be cancelled, ere we can be happy. All these are the

wants of the sinner, and we are each of us conscious that they are our own. There is not one of you, I am bold to affirm it, who has any other experience than this. No thoughtful mind can ponder its condition, can meditate upon its belongings, and surroundings, without a conviction that dislocation has come upon the symmetry of a nature once perfect—and that broods of evil passions and vices, like a flock of birds unholy, nestle in the corners of the heart. This then is the basal fact, upon which the religiousness of every man reposes—the existence of sin, as an acknowledged evil, which has not only tainted the nature, but which has poured its corruption over every part of every man. Alike in the busy city's streets, and amid the scantier tribes of the savannah—alike where refinement and civilisation gild and soften crime, and where, in the swarth and bearded Druse, son of the desert, it reigns tameless and wild—alike in sordid man and lost woman, and in generous youth and smiling babe—in all circumstances and in all countries—in all parallels of latitude and diversities of language—there is neither escape nor exception from this disastrous uniformity of evil. The fountain of the nature has been corrupted, and the streams, of necessity, must flow polluted and impure. Every mouth is stopped, for all the world is guilty before God.

The second fact—palpable upon the face of the psalm—is, that this conviction of personal sin, wrought upon the heart of the psalmist, produced in him feelings of the deepest penitential sorrow. The presence of evangelical contrition may be recognised in every syllable of its imploring earnestness and importunate

appeal. It is the wail of a broken heart—of a heart which sobs, rather than speaks, its bitterness and its vehemence of desire. You can almost see the heaving breast, and the short, suffocating pants of sorrow. Even in the latter verses, when the hope is brightening and the faith seems to grasp deliverance, it is the penitent heart still—feeling its sting only a little less sharply, softened down into a pensive rather than a painful memory, trembling through its tears into a strange bewildered joy. It is a chastened gladness—like the flower-cup in which the dewdrops are impearled—or like the arch of Heaven, the child of the sun and of the rain. And as the existence of sin is a universal fact, so the feeling of penitence must be a universal experience, ere that sin can be purged away.

All the instances in Scripture of acceptable approach to God on the part of those who have offended him, are connected with the presence of a broken and contrite heart. From the earliest significant intimation—when the whirlwind scattered the offering of the self-confident Cain, and the fire consumed the sacrifice of the contrite Abel—the same truth is taught through all ages of Scripture history, and repeated in rich volume of utterance in the fulness of time, that “to that man will I look,” says God, “even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” You see it in the prostrate David and in the weeping Hezekiah—when the prodigal mourns in the parched land of his exile; and when the publican, beating his breast in the porch of the temple, fixes upon the far mercy-seat his wistful eye, and stammers out his heart in the self-despairing prayer. And is it not natural that it

should be so? Who could feel otherwise, that has a right estimate of the foulness of sin?

Think of the grand harmony of the moral universe, all deranged by this vile discord of evil—think of this disturbing element, not merely smiting the earth with a curse, and plunging all its inhabitants beneath a terrible shadow of penalty, but dashing, like an angry breaker, before the throne of the Divine, and interrupting God's complacency in the perfection of the creatures he has made—think of a taint so thorough and so general, that it can be eradicated only by a new expedient of mercy, and healed only by exhausting the fulness of heaven—think of God's outraged honour and violated law, and of your own neglected opportunity and forfeited privilege, and then say if any sorrow that you can feel for sin can be too intense and absorbing—whether it should moan in speechless agony, or charge the head with waters and make the eyes a fountain of tears.

Such is the essential difference of temperament and circumstance in the human family, that this sorrow will be varied in its developments and expressions. The great law of variety, which is impressed upon universal creation, will be equally manifested here; and just as there are different curves in smiles that are equally sunny, and different tones in equally hearty laughter, and different styles in forms that strike upon us with an equal sense of loveliness—so, in cases of equally genuine penitence, each may feel after a diverse type of sadness. It may be seen by the brow of unusual thoughtfulness, or by the tear which has eluded the watchers, but which is pursued and brushed off so soon

as its escape is discovered. In one it may abstract the mind from earthly things in a dull indifference—in another it may concentrate every energy into intenser and more passionate play. It may be silent in its weeping, or unable to weep at all—frantic in its cries, or smitten with a deep horror of silence—it may burst, like a flood, into a strong man's heart, and convulse his whole nature with its tides of stormful feeling, or it may ripple like a rill into some quiet, womanly spirit, subduing all her unbelief and pride—ay, it may sometimes (for I would not dare to limit the way of God's workings, and I would be free from the profane blasphemy that would say, "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the chief of the devils") swoon the life out of the body, and produce those strange and painful symptoms at which fanaticism scoffs, and which sceptical science reduces to a mere complex hysteria. But, however diverse in its expressions and in its duration, it is always there: wherever there is a penitent heart, there will be, there must be, the feeling of sorrow for sin. If the arrow is not sharp in the heart, there needs no stanching hand nor healing balm—if the heart is not broken within the man, there needs no gentle ministering from him "who healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

I have been the more earnest in presenting this truth before you, because I fear there is a disposition in some modern teachings to ignore the necessity for repentance, or to trust it as but an accidental and subsidiary thing. Brethren, you will not certainly suspect me of wishing to cramp the freeness of the Gospel offer. I rejoice to know that, whenever God has in his mercy

permitted me to blow the trumpet of salvation, I have been enabled to proclaim that there was always music in its blast which might that moment gladden the hearts of universal man—but I dare not make the offer freer than God himself has made it in the repeated declarations of his Word. He has sent me to preach; but it is to preach repentance, and then remission of sins. Christ, who has given me my commission, is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour; but it is to “give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” If there be before me hearts that are hardening themselves in impiety, spirits that are running greedily after Balaam’s profanity, or Korah’s gainsaying, or Ahab’s covetousness, or Herod’s pride—and who, even under the Word, while its solemn truth is spoken, are hiding themselves in refuges of lies—who are imagining that, after a life spent in ungodliness, some volition which they can at any moment exercise, some turning of the faint soul heavenward, some cry—not because of hated sin, but because of nearing hell—will avail to secure them at last—I dare not speak of mercy to you, until your hearts are discharged from the bondage of such a fatal error. To you it is my duty to speak in tones of warning—and may the Saviour, who originally uttered them, clothe them with unwonted power—“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” To those of you that are contrite and sore broken, mute or disquieted because of the evil of your sin, to you it is my pride and pleasure—the greatest I have in life—to tell you that—unwittingly perhaps—you have by the Spirit rendered unto God an offering which he never turns away; for “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a

broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Those who admit these two facts—the existence of sin and the necessity for penitence—and who duly appreciate their importance, will be anxious to be guarded against the possibility of error as to the nature of that sacrifice, which is said to be thus acceptable in the sight of God. I need not remind you that there is a sorrow which worketh death, and that there are semblances of genuine contrition which are not only unavailing, but pernicious. There is a dark spectre of remorse, which flits full oft avengingly before the conscience even of the stoutest sinner. He may tremble, as some sudden death or other alarming providence forces upon him the contemplation of the inevitable end. His heart may not be utterly callous; he may relent in his perverseness, and regret his folly; under some subduing influence he may vow reformation, and be melted into tears; and yet, with all this, there may be an utter absence of one single element appertaining to the contrition of the Bible. His motive may be unworthy. He may mourn the past, because he smarts under the consequences of his imprudence; he may dread the future, because of the fearful retribution which it will bring. His conceptions of the Divine character may be unworthy. He may regard Jehovah as a tyrant, before whom he must crouch in servile terror; or as a Father, so weakly indulgent that he will be moved from the course of justice by the plea of tears; or, notwithstanding that He has provided a Saviour, and announced with all possible solemnity that there is salvation in no other, he may flippantly pass by the provision, and

proffer his own wretched works or brooding sorrow, in the stead of the propitiation of the well-beloved Son.

That there are multitudes who do present this lame and blemished offering is a matter which we need not try to prove—the demonstrations of it are so painful and so multiplied. In all ages of the world men have been infatuated enough to travel from the fountain, opened and sparkling by their side, to some glittering Pharpar stream of their own Damascus; and there are many now who inherit all the madness of their ancestors, and are speeding to the same doom. Ah! why will men persist in the presentation of a sacrifice other than God has prescribed, and to which, therefore, he can have no respect?

Brethren, are any of you thus blinded, offering to God a penitence which is imperfect, or which is insincere? Are you building a fabric of your own fancied merits, and do you gaze upon the pillared morals and piled-up charities, and imagine that they will stand, when the storm rocks the battlements of earth's proudest towers? Alas! they are all useless. They cannot profit. And they who vainly build them, and continue to confide in them to the last, will be banished and doomed like Dathan and Abiram, as the offerers of strange fire.

The various qualities of genuine repentance are well brought before us in successive verses of the Psalm; and, as for a brief moment we enumerate them—we can hardly do more—you will be able to judge whether their counterpart is found within yourselves. There is in all genuine repentance *a hope in God's mercy*—a remembrance, even in the deepest sadness

of loving-kindness which compassionates, and which delights to blot out the transgression.

This distinguishes the true contrition from the careless confession, which hardens the heart by exhausting the springs of its feeling—and from the frantic and hurrying despondency which, as in the case of Judas, precipitates its victim into suicide. Godly sorrow worketh not death, but life. From the broken heart spring all the joys of salvation—just as from the broken soil the harvest, or from the broken vase the odour of precious ointment, or from the broken cloud the bountiful and blessed rain.

There is presented in the second verse, the contrite soul's *loathing of sin*. And this is an essential mark of distinction between simulated and real repentance. The truly contrite ask not for impunity, so much as for holiness—not so much for peace, as for purity. They are not content to be delivered from the penalty of sin—they struggle upward for freedom from its power. Here again is a divining rod, by which to sunder the false from the true. Ask that slavish spirit, which is kept from evil courses by the naked sword or the devouring fire, whether, if these were absent, he would still persevere in his contrition. If no reward followed upon holiness, if no penalty scathed and scorched the souls of evil-doers, would he still desire the right and fight against the wrong?

In the third verse we have the fulness of the penitent's confession. There is no attempt to extenuate, nor to conceal. He does not plead the force of circumstance, nor the Niagara flood of passion, nor even the resistance which he made before he

fell. There is the simple, humble, truthful acknowledgment of sin—sin, though years have passed away since its committal—sin, though society has condoned it—sin, though neighbours have forgotten it—sin, though through many a garish hour he has tried vainly to hide it from himself—sin, burned into the conscience with such ineffaceable impression, that no human art can remove the brand, though the lightest touch of the Divine Healer can make the scarred flesh to be comely and lovesome as a child's.

The fourth verse shows us how the true penitent looks through all that is merely earthly and inferior, and sees his transgression to be against the original Giver of the law. David could not be insensible to the social aspect of his crime. He had ruined a reputation, dishonoured a household, wrecked the comfort of a family, plotted the murder of one who had never injured him—but the sanctity of whose home had been invaded by his lustful desire—and yet, above and beyond all these, he is crushed by the conviction of the wrong that he has done to the Divine—"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."

In subsequent verses, there is recognised the radical taint of the nature and its transmission in hereditary malady—the spirituality of the law, and its requirement of inner as well as outer holiness—the necessity for the influences of the Holy Spirit, to perfect the new creation and start and sustain the soul in its pilgrimage of diviner life; and then, in the words before the text, we have the penitent's absolute will-

ingness to part with all, to render all, to endure all, if only his desire may be granted, and his sin forgiven—"Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offering." What a high sense does this reveal of the inestimable worth of the blessing which the penitent thus fervently desires! What entire self-renunciation! What preparation for almost illimitable sacrifice! If sacrifice availed—oh, how gladly would I heap upon the altar the costliest and the rarest I could find! If thou hadst delighted in burnt-offering, how freely should the flocks have been slaughtered, and the sky have been reddened by the fires of a blazing hecatomb! Impose upon me what conditions thou wouldst, they should be cheerfully fulfilled. Bid me relinquish all prospect of affluence; and I will revel in the rugged homespun on the banquet of the crust and of the spring. Bid me surrender the dearest intercourses of life; and I will grasp the palmer-staff, and buckle the sandals on, and go forth into the valley alone. Sunder me from the good words of my fellows; and I will be content to be unknown and slandered, if only thy terrors be restrained, and the light of thy countenance be lifted up upon my soul. Tell me that my country must know me no more; and I will wander afar and fugitive, among the purple hills or by the chainless sea; and the alp and the wilderness shall be each of them a metropolis, if thy presence be with me there. Send me to Nineveh with a message of wrath—better the oaths of a ribald city, than thy solitary curse upon my soul. My spirit longs for thy favour. Oh, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation! It were cheap to

me, if I plunged for it into the depths of the proud waters, or purchased it through the scorings of the baptism of fire.

Brethren, here are some of the characteristics of the penitent soul. Are they yours? Have you a lively hope in God's mercy?—an intense loathing of sin? Are you frank in your confessions, and earnest in your purposes of amendment? Do you long for the inner transformation, which shall bring that subtle, strange, mysterious world of thought within you into subjection to the obedience of Christ? Are you anxiously seeking for the gift of the Holy Ghost? Are you willing to render any sacrifice, or to be saved on any terms, however they may grate upon your prejudice, or humble your pride? Oh, if you are are thus repentant—in your greatest agony of sadness you are the heir of God's multiplied pardons. He waits to be gracious to you. He casts out none who thus come in contrition to his feet. You need neither sacrifice nor burnt-offering. Come in your brokenness of spirit, with your sorrowful consciousness of sin, to the great and abiding atonement. It was offered for the lost and for the guilty. Rest on it, and you shall live. Does it strike you as strange, that there should be the statement that God desires not sacrifice, neither delighteth in burnt-offering, when the entire system of the Old Testament economy was a ritual of sacrifice, and without the shedding of blood could be no remission of sin—when the burnt-offerings were Divinely enjoined and perpetuated until the fulness of times by Heaven's express command?

Brethren, living as you do under a brighter and a

spiritual economy, it should be no matter of wonder. You do not suppose for a moment that sacrifice and burnt-offering were ever acceptable to God in themselves, or for their own sake. There could be no acceptable service to that God, who is a Spirit, and who requires spiritual worship, when the blood of a bullock was presented *instead* of the devotion of a heart. He, whose are the silver and the gold and the cattle upon a thousand hills, could be no richer for the costliest offering. He, the God of Love—who cares for a sparrow, and satisfies a raven, and yearns over a child—could have no delight in the taking of life and the streaming of blood. The Jewish sacrifices evinced not God's pleasure in suffering, but God's hatred of sin. They were not to supersede penitence and faith, but to deepen the conviction by a representation of the death, which the offerer of the sacrifice had himself deserved. There was nothing in them purifying; they were worthless as carrion, save that they typified the Victim Divine, on whom God has laid the iniquity of us all. Above all, we in these evangelical days, heirs of all the ages and of all the economies, should understand why God desires not our sacrifices. Why should he when he looks upon his *own*? Christ hath died—then live, ye flocks of Kedar. The Redeemer of the world atones—then crumble, ye altars of an external worship. The blood is on the mercy-seat—then it need be neither in the temple, nor on the skirts of the garment, nor on the hands of the worshipper.

“That blood we take, that blood alone,
And make the covenant peace our own.”

Bring obedience to God's precepts: *that* is "better than sacrifice." Hearken to his commandments: he prefers that to the fat of rams.

God answers a world's question in this passage. In all ages and in every heart there seems to be an instinct of worship: all nations have offered sacrifice to some beings whom they deified as gods. There is no region where the pilgrim foot can travel, where you will not find offerings—some sanguinary, some libidinous, some foolish, but all to propitiate the anger or to secure the protection of the objects of worship. There comes a cry out of the great heart of humanity—What is the acceptable sacrifice? Secret mysteries, and strange divinations, and streaming altars, cakes for the Queen of Heaven, prostration to a brazen image, children passed through the fire for the insatiate Moloch—these are the responses from classic and Pagan times. African Fetishism, Hindu immolations, Burman cruelty, the savage atrocities of cannibalism—these are the hollow answers from the uninstructed consciences of heathendom. Cold moralities, rubrical exactitude, sacramental efficacy, ascetic self-denial—these are the polite and conventional theories of modern formalism. And as they are all offered, and the worshippers look eagerly for the accepting fire—all is silence, and the clouds are dark above, and there is no voice nor any that regardeth the proud, and cold, and cruel sacrifice. But yonder—crouching in humble attitude, with eyes that he almost fears to lift, but which yet struggle through their tears to fasten their gaze upon the Crucified—is a poor contrite sinner, without an offering, save

that he offers himself ; without a plea, save that he is guilty, and that " Christ hath died ;" without a hope, save in the multitude of tender mercy ; and the clouds roll harmlessly away, and the sky is clear, and the lambent fire leaps down, and the voice speaks from the Man at the right hand of the Throne—

" The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

XXXVI.

DAVID'S VOWS UNTO GOD.

“Thy vows are upon me, O God : I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death : wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living ?”—Ps. lvi. 12, 13.

THERE is an exquisite plaintiveness in the superscription of this psalm, in which David describes himself as a “dumb dove among strangers,” and pours out to the chief musician a song of his secret, when the Philistines seized him in Gath. It was written probably, when, fleeing from the roused jealousy of the infuriate Saul, he had taken refuge at the court of Achish, king of Gath, and found himself there an object of not unnatural suspicion, and beset with perils, from which he escaped only by simulating madness.

If he had been a vassal of circumstance—if his happiness had been dependent upon external conditions of advantage—surely now despair had seized him ; for he was hunted like a hart upon the mountains ; a cloud hung darkly over the future ; and he, who had been a companion of princes, wandered homeless and without a friend. But his faith waxed

the stronger as the occasion of its trials came—just as there are brave sea-birds which play amid the storm, whose earliest blast startles more timid wings, and sends them fluttering home. In those seasons of apparent hopelessness, his harp trilled out some of its most rapturous doxologies, and some of the most sublime expressions of its confidence in God.

In the psalm before us, though he commences by bewailing his evil estate and imploring succour, it is not the cry of despondency, but of confidence ; it is not the shriek of the shipwrecked—drowned by the louder howlings of the tempest, which refuses cruelly to carry it to human ears ; it is the cry of the child, frightened by some real or imaginary danger, but who knows that in the next room there is its father, and that he will be loving to pity, and powerful to help. His faith does not falter from its sure trust, even in extremest sorrow and fear. He knows himself the victim of conspiracy—slandered by the evil tongues of perverse and unreasonable men—an exile in the country where he has been promised a throne ; and yet he rests assured in the confidence that there is an eye which marks his flight, and a chalice which holds his tears. An inner revelation has fortified him with the hope of a Divine defender. To the eye of his triumphant faith the predictions are accomplished and the deliverance achieved already ; and in the warmth of his gratitude he sings of escape in the very jaws of danger—as if from the caged lark were to burst suddenly the wild wood-notes, with which he was wont to give greeting at heaven's gate in the light and freedom of the morning. “Thy

vows are upon me, O God : I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death : wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living ?”

Brethren, there is hardly a phase of man's experience or feeling, which is not responded to in one or other of these intensely human psalms ; and in this case, I am persuaded, there are hearts that answer to the history. We have felt compassed round by enemies, the more formidable because invisible to human eye—because the light of the living glanced upon no shining steel. In our hearts there have been all the pang and the loneliness of exile. We have felt all the bitterness of tears, or that more dreaded bitterness which is vainly covetous of tears. We have been sure that our steps were dogged as by unfriendly watchers ; and that in our strife against opposing evil there was no moment's interval, in which it was safe for us to unlace the corselet and lay down the sword. And—more painful memories than these—we have been conscious of our own waywardness and compromise ; we have been haunted by the ghosts of broken vows ; we have trembled—like the guilty things we were—as we trod amongst the fractures of a covenant, shattered by our shortcoming and by our sin ; and we have oftentimes gone out to the battle like a faint-hearted king, whose path has been crossed by sinister omens, or his slumbers troubled by unsightly dreams.

It may be that these memories are at work with some of you to-day. In prospect of the solemn service with which the piety of our fathers has sought

to hallow the opening year, your thoughts have gone back into the past. Memory has come, like a grey-beard chronicler, or "minstrel, infirm and old," and has rehearsed before you the events of the departed year. You have remembered its beginning: the solemnity which took possession of your soul, the lowliness of your prostration, the strength and the publicity of the bond by which you bound yourselves to Christ; and you have been grieving to find how the outside world has been suffered to hinder—how your journey has been through the wilderness sometimes without the arm of the beloved—how your hearts have proved recreant to their trust, and have failed in their watchfulness or valour. Some present trial depresses you. You are pained and humbled before God. Well, it is to you that I come, with the full knowledge of your sorrow and of your failure—with the sympathy with both gathered out of my own heart; and in all sincerity I ask you to sing with me the concluding verses of this psalm.

It is not a cruel wish, as your repining spirits would murmur. It is true that in common life, "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart." It is true that it is cheerless work to chant, through the chill and heavy air of darkness, the songs in the night. It is true that when the harp of the heart is out of tune, the harp of the hand will droop from the pendant willows over Euphrates' stream. And yet—not heedless of the irreparable past, but hopeful for the advancing future—there is cause for our melody to-day.

The various year, through which the providence of God has brought us, though it has witnessed our failure, has not destroyed, but deepened our obligation. The grateful feeling which rejoices over forbearance from judgment—the humbled feeling which mourns its own defective service—the startled feeling which anticipates existing danger—and the hopeful feeling which dreams of a more loyal future—all combine to urge our consecration again. If there has been treason in the past, let the fidelity of the coming retrieve it. If we have squandered part of our allotted inheritance of time, let us hoard the residue with an avarice of care; and let to-day mediate, by its central decision, between the offence of the past and the promise of the future. Let it stand, the orphan of the old time, the father of the new—as Noah amid the worlds of God.

There are in the passage before us three things, which should be fixed upon our minds:—

- I. *The motive.*
- II. *The obligation.*
- III. *The expression.*

I. Motive is the spring of all mental action. God has so framed us, that we are susceptible of impressions from without, and are affected by considerations of interest or injury towards good or evil. We are free, but we are not independent of influence. We are, if we will to be so, above the control of circumstances. But they are not ineffective; pressing upon us, as they do, so closely, they are often counsellors to confirm us in the right, or tempters to warp us to

the wrong. We are not their vassals; they have no original power, such as the master exerts over his slaves. They are but vassals of a higher suzerain, and pay tribute to the regal conscience and the lordly will. But with this reservation, they are mighty in their influence, and often incline men's hearts either to resist, or yield to evil. It is the balancing of motives—the rejection of this, and the acknowledgment of that—by the will in its grand assize, which tends to the formation of those habitudes we call character; and each trifle is tributary to that, for life is only one long term-time, and the “court of conscience sitteth every day.” God has recognised our susceptibility to external influences by the creation of our passions, which he has made to tremble like the chords of a harp, when they are struck by some incident or agency of the world. Hence the continual appeals in the Scripture to our hope and fear; hence, also, the retributions of the future—announced that they may be incentives to the present—the penalty which assuredly follows upon wrong-doing—the recompense of blessing, with which patient righteousness is crowned. It does not surprise us, therefore, that even in an act so solemn as that of personal consecration to God, the covenant should not rest frigidly as a cold obedience to abstract and undisputed claim, but should be enlived—so to speak—by the lovingness of a gratitude which would fain embody its thankfulness and praise. And, indeed, there are few that will not own the constraint, which a sense of recent deliverance brings. On the slopes of Ararat rested the keel of the ark, which held within its

massy ribs that precious argosy of life ; and when the saved ones stood upon the turf of the refuge hill, and gazed upon the subsiding waters, the altar rose, and the sacrifice smoked upon it to represent their gratitude and faith. The sense of deliverance intensified the duty of devotion.

There can be no doubt that the mind of David had been harassed, when he wrote this psalm, by the apprehension of impending death. He was not safe in Israel, for the jealousy of the king was roused ; and when monarchs plot evil, the ready tools of kingcraft abound on every hand. His renown, moreover, had imperilled his safety in other and alien lands. He was too great to be obscure. The song of the Hebrew damsels, which first enkindled the jealous passion of the king, had made his name familiar as the Hebrews' champion and the Philistines' scourge, so that he could scarcely hope, humanly speaking, to escape with life. But he seems to have been assured by some unspoken word, that he should not fall into the hands of his enemies ; and, in the gush of gratitude for his deliverance from death, he bound himself by the solemn vow : "Thou hast delivered my soul from death." "Thy vows are upon me, O God ! I will render praises unto thee."

You acknowledge the sequence—do you not ? It is a perfectly legitimate corollary, and your own hearts are confessing its power. Brethren, I want to use this motive to bring a sweet constraint upon your present decision. If deliverance from temporal destruction influenced the Psalmist to a covenant, surely *you* have motives higher and sublimer far. Look

back upon your past of providence. Remember how grace has furnished you with its amplest and most magnificent provision. You can say, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death," with a fulness of precious meaning—which even David could not rival.

The same providence has watched over you; and the great atonement, which he lived too early to see, has shed upon you its showers of health and blessing. Death has hovered near you—the death of the body; "the shape that shape has none" has lurked behind the treacherous elements, or crept stealthily in the slow disease, or breathed his poison on the ambient air. It may be that he has been nearer than you dare to think, and that his dart was caught and blunted by the ministry of loving watchfulness, before it reached the heart against which it was all too surely aimed. The year, with its vicissitude, of seasons, has passed over, and you have been screened alike from summer smiting and from winter's cold. The harvestman has reaped thick sheaves and housed them in his charnel-garner; but you live. You have missed many whom you know from their accustomed haunts; the gloom on many houses sits where lies the master newly dead; but you live. Perhaps the shadow has fallen upon your own pathway; or there are hatchments in your memory for the missed and mourned among your friends; but you live—and through the long vista of the opening year, there stretches for you promise and vision, and you gaze with a sense of lordship and of power. Oh, for the mere gift and rapture of dear life! ransomed from its forfeit, and continued to you by the free grace of him who asks

your heart. You are bound to consecration to-day. Death has hovered near you—the death of the soul—that spiritual dying, which is of all others most terrible, because in its mortal agony all others are comprehended. Fierce temptations have beset you. Lethargy has lain in ambush, and presumption has asked truce and greeting. The syren world has mingled the cup of her enchantments, and has thrown the rarest melody into her voice. Even on your track has been the ancient and restless enemy, and your passions have turned recreant or traitorous within.

And yet I speak to those who are spiritually alive to-day. You have been—it may be—borne down in the fierce battle. Many around you have fallen; you have seen their resistance growing feebler and feebler, until at last they were led captive and dishonoured. There are stains upon *your* banner. Thoroughly weaponed as you were, there are dints upon your coat of mail; but you looked to the Captain of your salvation, and a strange courage came into you; and by his grace you live to-day. Oh! for your soul's escape from the snares that have been laid for it—for your growth in all the secrets of spiritual mastery—for the union, which, unworthy as you are, you are permitted to maintain with God—for the growing freedom of your spirit from every member of your former body of death—for that sense of near Omnipotence on which you lean securely—for that majestic hope which gilds the sky of your sunset—for all these conferred upon you by Christ your Saviour, parts of that wondrous deliverance by which he has compassed the destruction of death—you are bound

to consecration to-day. Brethren, does not the gratitude burn within you like a fire? Does it not prompt you to an enthusiasm of decision, which all the decorums of the sanctuary are hardly sufficient to restrain? Contrast your own position with that of others less favoured—now in the tomb o'er which the dank grass waves; or in the fouler sepulchre where the death is living—and then I am sure of you for God. While you are musing, the fire will burn more brilliantly; then, in the presence and fellowship of the ransomed race, you will speak with your tongue—"Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

II. The obligation which rests upon you is to feel yourself the Lord's—at liberty to serve no other master—pledged to all the conditions which are binding upon the Lord's bondsmen. "Thy vows are upon me, O Lord." The Christian who would be a Christian indeed, must not be ashamed of the *yoke* of Christ. Religion is not only an enjoyment of privilege, but a service of love. The dearest name which apostolic hearts could know—that which thrilled them with a prouder rapture than if they had won patrician honours or been clad in the senator's purple—was to call themselves "James, and Jude, and Peter, the servants of the Lord Jesus." They affected no independence from servitude. It was only a transfer of allegiance. Formerly they served sin—languished in its bitter

bondage until the iron entered into their soul. Now they served Christ, and his service was perfect freedom. And so it is still. The highest Christian liberty is a willing restraint. There is a royal freedom, when the patriot, who has won liberty for his country, retires from the field rather than embarrass the completion of her enfranchisement, and is content to let others wear the diadem, while in his islet-home he is a king without a crown. There is a sweet sense of liberty, when youth and beauty, forgetful of the carol and the triumph, chain themselves to the hospital and become the angels of the dying—blessed only by the fevered lips of those amongst whom, all true, and brave, and womanly, they move. And so to the true believer, there is no liberty so blessed as that which binds him to his Master; and it is the very jubilee of that diviner freedom when every thought is led captive by the obedience of Christ.

It will not seem strange to you then, when you are summoned thus publicly to recognise the vows which you have acknowledged in your secret soul. Vows—as the deliberate resolves of settled purpose—are often recorded in Scripture; from the time when Jacob vowed unto the Lord in Bethel, and when Hannah vowed to dedicate her first-born, to the later period, when the frightened mariners vowed in order to clear themselves of blood-guiltiness after they had cast Jonah to the waves, and when Paul had shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow. But the vows which the Psalmist made were not limited, but comprehensive. And the vows which you, in imitation of his loving example, are called upon to make to-day,

are vows which include the sacrifice of every sin and the consecration of every faculty; which comprise every circle of your sympathies, and grasp, in their thoroughness, your very being. God claims both yours and *you*. Bring into your mind—that you may intelligently offer them—what the vows of God involve. You are called to forsake, utterly and for ever, the service of evil; and to guard mind and hands and tongue from entertainment or dalliance with sin. You are called—in pious recognition of God's claim, and in hearty approval of his laws—to yield yourselves to him in living sacrifice. You are called to present your adoring homage to the Divine perfections—to live in the spirit of prayer—to attend diligently to the cultivation of the heart—and to maintain that continual “looking unto Jesus,” which grows into the beauty on which it gazes. You are called to exhibit among men that you are thoroughly in earnest, and that you are graciously transformed; to maintain a consistency as blameless in things secular, and in things social, as in things spiritual; to be as godly in the home as in the temple; as spotless in the shop and on the 'Change, as when you breathe the sanctuary air. You are called to display no affected superiority, no glozing Pharisee-smile; but in a gentle lovingness, which the sense of Christ's love makes more tender, to watch for the helpless that you may succour them—to listen to the cry of the needy—and to fold the hapless straylings in the pastures where the good Shepherd dwells. You are called to make Christ's cause yours, to labour for it with intense energy, and to love it with intense affection; to join yourselves to

God's people according to his will ; to pass in cheerful solemnness the time of your sojourning here : and, amid the needful intercourses of this world, to be cheered in its sorrow, and to be chastened in its gladness, by the continual remembrance of another.

Now this is the substance of the vow which you are called upon to make unto the Lord. The summons comes to you—the men and women of the present—not to hermits in their cowardly retreat from the world's perils ; nor to worn-out, used-up pensioners upon the shreds of a plenty whose brimming chalice you have no power to quaff ; but to *you*, in all the glow of your opportunity and in all the vigour of your manliness ; to *you*, who have power to work and light to work in. The summons is to *you*. You are called to offer the fulness of a life—its wealth, its sparkle, its music—all the summer of it. Things that it would cost something for flesh and blood commonly to surrender—these are to be the offerings—cast with a glad heart and with a free will upon the altar of the Lord. Are you ready for it ? Have you the heart—or, rather, have you the grace, for it is of Divine bestowment—for such rare and exquisite heroism ? Can you thus trample upon self and sin ? Then come with us, and as you take thankfully “the cup of salvation,” we “will call upon the name of the Lord.”

III. It would appear, further, that the cheerfulness of this spirit of self-sacrifice finds its legitimate expression in *praise*, and its ardour in a prevailing desire to “*walk before God*.” The requirement of praise

assures us of the publicity of the covenant, and of the heartiness with which it is rendered. Praise is the natural effect of the impressions produced upon the mind by the contemplation of excellence, or wisdom, or power. It is articulate adoration—the burst of the rapt soul, which properly conceives of God. Hence it is the employment of heaven; and in the courts of the earthly Zion “praise waiteth for thee, O God.” And it is this spirit which breaks out in praises, which distinguishes a Christian service from the taskwork of the slave, or from the stunted labour of the hireling. The thrall works sullenly; there is a glare in his eye that is not a human fire; the relations between him and his master are those of hate on the one hand, and scorn on the other. The hireling works mechanically, or, it may be, zealously; but the relations between him and his employer are those of trade and barter—so much work done for so much wages given. But the Christian’s is a willing service; he finds his inspiration in his labour, and his recompense too; for in keeping God’s commandments there is *present* reward. No sense of drudgery depresses him; he winces beneath no “axes and harrows” of servitude. The motive which prompts him to action is one which “runneth over.” He finds himself beyond the commandment, though it is “exceeding broad.” In the building of the temple which he strives to rear for God, his willing spirit would fain work *overtime*—long after its “tale of bricks” is done. Brethren, you are called to this cheerful consecration. God asks your praises—of the lip, joyous and warbling hallelujahs—of the heart, the calm reliance, the wish-

ful waiting, the trembling, half-breathed question, not yet translated into uttered speech: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—of the life, the ordered conversation, the self-devotion, the example, the commanded household, the rippling influence, widening as it flows; the Beulah-spirit and the Beulah-dwelling, just on the other side the water from the city of God. God asks them from you, and your response is ready. Even now your hearts reply—"I will render praises unto thee."

It will be your desire also to "walk before God." The very vows which you are prepared to pay necessitate the perpetual recognition of God's presence, and the reference of all earth's conduct to the supremacy of Heaven's will. You were a sinner once, and then "God was not in all your thoughts." You entered upon your transactions of business; but you did not take him into partnership. You invited your parties of pleasure; but you enrolled not *his* name among the guests. You were stimulated to diligence or enterprise; but your motive was—"My friends will be proud of me for this." You were deterred from some cherished purpose of sin; but "What will society say?" was your wholesome and stern reprover. You looked and lived no higher. To you, earth was the end; the sky shut out the heaven, and the planet was without a God. But it is not so with you now. Your aim is to glorify, and your life to exhibit, God. Behind your every action there is the thought—"How will this look to the Divine? When the glory shines upon it, will it be leprous or pure? 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?'" This

vestal fire, kept lighted within, will make the outer life radiant. This monarch-purpose, imperial in the inner man, will rule over a peaceful and united kingdom. Look at that son of genius, when the hour of his inspiration is upon him. See him as he pours upon the paper the regal imaginings of his soul. See how he blushes in his solitude—like a novice at his first audience of royalty—because a great thought has struck upon the brain and reddened all the cheek; or reels and staggers, as if drunk with the fulness of his own sense of beauty. Think you he writes for self, or for the few who now and then enliven his loneliness? Not so. He has a world before him—invisible, and yet as palpable as if he saw their faces beam or darken, and heard their varying voices of rapture or of blame. That statesman on the hustings—calm and eloquent amid the heat of a contested election—rich and measured in his enunciation of lofty principles, or in his exposition of a far-sighted policy—think you that he addresses the beery enthusiasm of the crowd? Does he speak to those shoeless patriots, who are anxious to gain a ragged immortality by improving the chance to hoot and pelt at a great man? Nay; surely *his* audience is one which the multitude have no eyes to see. By the power of the press he sees his words already subjected to the admirer's rapturous study, and the rival's anxious criticism. The Bourses of Europe are controlled by his sentiments; crowned heads in their cabinets are pondering and profiting by his wisdom. And so the Christian endures, "as seeing him who is invisible." He yearns to find out the right, as *God* sees it. His

effort is to "walk before God." Tell him that the world sneers at him; that slander is busy with his fame; that all the pundits and Rabbis of the world's various schools of scoffing have launched their imitation lightnings at his head. You hear his calm reply: "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord." Let the dark day come, and there be presented to him the alternatives of evil—that the famine shall trample out his manhood, or the sword waste in his borders, or the pestilence consume his blood—his choice is easily made: "Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man"—and his highest ambition will be gratified, if in the last throes of mortal agony he can bare his heart to the fulness of the Divine scrutiny, and gasp out the dying words: "Thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee."

XXXVII.

A PLEA FOR THE DISTRESSED.

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?”—ISA. lviii. 6, 7.

IN the former verses of the chapter you discover the state of heart of the Jewish people in the course of their mysterious preparation for destruction. Already there had come upon them the first symptoms of that fatal blindness, by which “a deceived heart turned them so hopelessly aside.” It is the voice of the Lord which speaks, and he enjoins the prophet to be loud and urgent in his warnings, if haply they might be roused to a sense of their guilt and peril. They were in that condition which is of all others the most appalling—the condition of the self-deceived. They were ostentatious in their approaches to the sanctuary, and punctual in their many prayers. They fasted vigorously, and even thought themselves righteously angry because so little audience was given them, and because so little of benefit followed upon their affliction of soul.

The Lord defines, therefore, in his own vindication, the nature of the humiliation which alone he will accept

and honour. He wills not an ascetic observance, but a cheerful self-denial; not a painful and lacerating torture, but a sacrifice willingly rendered of substantial gratitude and praise. "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward."

There is no contradiction in the doctrine here taught of other passages in which the fast is divinely sanctified, and the solemn assembly ordered by divine command.

There are occasions which justify, and even which require, national prostration and sorrow; and there is no sublimer moral spectacle than the sight of a great people, as by one common impulse, moved to penitence and prayer. But in the case before us, there was both alloy in the motive and reserve in the consecration. There was self-righteous satisfaction in the act—the usual labour of dependants was exacted, so that the gain was hoarded even while the soul was scourged—

and the men went greedily from their penance to their vengeance, as though they deemed that the endurance of their trial had given them licence to be quarrelsome and cruel. It is in contrast to this mockery of self-denial that the words of this chapter are written; and God proclaims—so that all the world may know it—that he will not have the lying fast; that he will not listen to the false prayer; that the careless observance and the heartless supplication are alike displeasing in his sight; and that if men would please him and secure his favour, it must be—not by a day's mortification, wrung in reluctant pause from the sinning habits of a lifetime, and followed by a fierce relapse into rebellion—but by a consistent and happy devotion, which is firm in its hatred of sin and prompt in its personal sacrifice, which runs with willing feet to the succour of the needy, and would fain, by its devices of benevolence, mitigate or remove sin's present results of ruin.

Brethren, there is close analogy between our circumstances and the circumstances of the Hebrew people. We are not newly enlightened—the last trophies of some venturous missionary's toil—as were many of those to whom the apostles wrote. If there do linger about us any remnants of our paganism, it is because we have cherished them for years, and habit has made us fond of the badges of our darkness and shame. We revel in the light which only dawned greyly on the former time. We dwell beneath institutions venerable enough to fling broad shadows forth.

To us it is fitting that the prophet's lips should speak. We may be aptly rebuked by the faithfulness

of the seer's warning. The principles enunciated for the guidance of the Jewish people—so far, at any rate, as high religious ethics are concerned—are principles which must reign to-day. We are called to bring ourselves to the contemplation of suffering, that we may relieve it. In our enjoyment of health—that crown of life's blessings—we are called to sympathize with those who are deprived of its possession. And those especially, who have learned at the feet of Jesus, and who would hallow every action of their lives with the inspiration of our holy religion, are bound to be helpful in their measure, that so their good may not be evil spoken of; and that their religion, in one of its comeliest developments, may attract the attention of men.

It will not be necessary to enlarge at great length upon the principles of the passage before us. I may remind you—

I. That the poor and suffering have a claim for help; and

II. Urge it by their peculiar circumstances.

I. "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." This is the announcement of a grand fact, which has never yet been disproved—the distinct individual unity of the human race; that it is one family, though sundered by climate and language—one deep underlying identity, however chequered by the varieties of external condition. This relates man to man everywhere, makes all the world a neighbourhood, and founds upon universal affinity a universal claim. The old Roman could say, with a far-

sighted perception of this great truth—"I am a man ;—nothing therefore that is human can be foreign to me ;" and Christianity has exalted this sentiment into a perpetual obligation, and stamped it with the royal seal of heaven.

This general law, however, must be divided into minor modifications, or it will be practically useless.

It is not intended to contravene nature, but to assist and regulate its affections ; and if it be the world which is the object of pity, the very magnitude of the area may induce a vague generality, which will fritter away the intenseness of the feeling.

That is a suspicious affection which attaches itself to nobody in particular—which makes no heart its centre, and brightens no hearth-stone with its light. Its words may be loud and swelling. Like the blast of March, it may sweep noisily around men's dwellings, and drift the dust about in clouds ; but men are conscious only of discomfort when it blows. They do not trust it. But all private affections are recognised and hallowed, and are indeed the source from which all public virtues spring. They are not inconsistent with the love of the whole race ; they prepare for it, and lead to it, and scoop out the channels through which the tributes of its bounty may flow.

Who shall sympathize with oppressed peoples but the patriot heart, which rejoices in its own sacred roof-tree and in its own holy altar ? Who shall be eloquent for the rights of others but he who is manly in the assertion of his own ? Who shall succour breaking hearts and brighten desolate houses, but the man who gazes in proud love upon his children as they climb

upon his knees, or who realizes in daily fruition the unutterable tenderness of home ?

These two obligations, therefore—the claim of universal sympathy and the claim of particular relationship—are not incompatible, but fulfil mutually the highest uses of each other. God has taught in the Scripture the lesson of an universal brotherhood, and man must not gainsay the teaching. Shivering in the ice-bound or scorching in the tropical regions—in the lap of luxury, or in the wild hardihood of the primeval forest—man is my brother, and I cannot release myself from the obligation to do him good.

I cannot love all men equally. My own instincts, nature's provision, society's requirements, and God's commands, all unite in reprobation of that.

My wealth of affection must be in home, children, kindred, country ; but my pity must not lock itself in these. My regard must not compress itself within these limits merely ; my pity must go forth wherever there is human need and human sorrow. My regard must fasten upon the *man*, though he has flung from him the crown of his manhood in anger. I dare not despise him, because, there in the depths of his fall—as he lies before me prostrate and dishonoured—there shines through the filth and through the sin that spark of heavenly flame which God the Father kindled—that soul, over which God the Spirit yearns with continual desire, and which God the Eternal Son offered his own heart's blood to redeem.

There is no man now who can rightly ask the infidel question of Cain. God *has* made man his brother's keeper. We are bound to love our neighbour as our-

selves ; and if, in a contracted Hebrew spirit, you are inclined to press the inquiry, "And who is my neighbour?"—there comes a full pressure of utterance to authenticate and enforce the answer—*Man*. Thy neighbour! every one whom penury has grasped or sorrow startled—every one whom plague hath smitten or curse hath banned—every one from whose home the darlings have vanished, and around whose heart the pall hath been drawn.

"Thy neighbour! 'tis yon toiling slave,
Fettered in thought and limb;
Whose hopes are all beyond the grave—
Go thou and ransom him.

"Thy neighbour! 'tis that weary man,
Whose years are at their brim;
Bent low with sickness, care, and pain—
Go thou and comfort him.

"Thy neighbour! 'tis the fainting poor,
Whose eye with pain is dim;
Whom suffering tracks from door to door—
Go thou and succour him."

I observe further, that there are now, as there have been in every age since the earliest, distinctions of society in the world. It must so be from the nature of things. It is part alike of God's benevolent allotment and of his original economy. He makes no endless plains, nor uniform mountain ridges. He has stamped his own deep love of beauty on the undulating woodland, and on the flower-sprent hill, and on the pleasant varieties of peak, and copse, and stream. A level creation were not the creation of God. And it is so with society. It has of necessity its inequalities. Men may fret against them, but they cannot help them-

selves. Nothing can alter the irreversible law ; and if, by the fury of some revolutionary deluge, all things were reduced to a drear level of wastes to-day, you may be sure that some aspiring mountain-top would struggle through the billows to-morrow. Society could not cohere as a union of equals. There must be graduation and dependence. God hath set the poor in his condition, as well as the rich ; and " he that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker." The announcement of the Saviour—" Ye have the poor always with you "—is at once the averment of a fact and a perpetual commendation of them, as Christ's clients, to the succours of his church. Benevolence in their behalf is, moreover, positively enjoined, and enjoined because of their abiding existence as a class of the community. " The poor shall never cease out of the land : therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land." Hence it has been well said—" Poverty is the misfortune of some, and the disgrace of more ; but it is the inheritance of most." There will always be those who will need and will claim the helps and friendlinesses of their fellows above them. A few, by native energy or favouring circumstance, will raise themselves in the social scale, and climb the steps of fame or fortune ; but the mass must toil on through a lifetime in the condition in which they were born, with few reliefs and fewer aspirations—the mouth demanding and absorbing the ceaseless labour of the hands.

There is that in the constitution of society also, which requires that the class from which the ranks of

clamant poverty are recruited, should be always the largest class among us. The pyramid must stand upon its base. The wants of the population, naturally large, have been increased by the refinements of civilisation, and the sinew of the artisan has been purchased by the rich man's gold. They who gather the harvest, plough the waters, construct and work the machinery, are the stalwart purveyors to the necessity and to the comfort of life. Who shall say that they have not a claim upon the resources of the State they serve? and not only that, but, in seasons of especial need, upon the charity, upon the justice of the many who are enriched by their toil.

Once recognise the relationship, and the claim will inevitably follow. The sense of service rendered and of obligation created thereby will make that claim more sacred; and religion, attaching her holiest sanctions, lifts the recognition of the claim into a duty, which may not be violated without sin. "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice." "Whoso seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Nay, Christ himself—once poor in the travail of his incarnate life, and therefore touched with the feeling of their infirmities—adopts them as his own peculiar care; and, pointing to them as they shiver in rags, or parch from hunger, or wither in consuming pain, commends them to his church, that they may be warmed and fed and healed, adding the benediction which is itself a heaven—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

II. A very cursory meditation upon the circumstances of the poor man's lot will tend to enforce the appeal, which reason and Scripture unite to announce and commend. Let me remind you of *the nature of the occupations in which so many pass their lives.*

For the most part, there is in them only a dreary monotony—nothing to task the intellect, to engross the affections, or to call into play the finer sensibilities of the man. It is “Work, work, work, as prisoners work for crime;” and, in the ceaseless drudgery, the man is looked on only as a piece of animated mechanism, kept on because he can be scolded more readily, and worked more cheaply than the mechanism of brass or iron. The man within the man is degraded by the unintermitting toil. The taskwork is performed; the holidays come seldom—and when they do come, he is too listless to enjoy them—and the wages at the best are scanty, when the exhausting work is done. Day after day follow each other, and there is no prospect of retirement. The family grow up around him, and the little ones are clamorous for bread. No morning but calls him to labour. No evening but sets upon his weariness. The frosts gather upon his head; the lithe limbs lose their suppleness; there is a strange sinking at the heart. But he must work. At length infirmity disables him—or he reels and dies—leaving his wife to the cold world's buffetings, and his children to the stranger's charity or to the early grave.

Let me remind you again, *how the poor are debarred from many of the ordinary sources of enjoyment.*

Though sin has sorely afflicted humanity, there are

yet open many sources of pleasure; and from books, and friends, and intellectual conversation, and taste, and rambles amid the flowers, or in the woodland, or on the heathery hills, or by the "fringe of the living sea"—as well as from those exercises which are attached to Christian fellowship and enterprise—there can be realized a rapture which mitigates the curse, and which leaves no remorse behind. But from many of these the poor are, by the necessities of their position, debarred. They do not start fairly with their fellows in the race of intellectual acquirement. To them the sciences are sealed. It is but rarely that they can kindle before a great picture, or travel to a sunny landscape, or be thrilled beneath the spell of a great poet's mighty words. Not for them the pleasures of sense—the ample board—the convenient dwelling—the gathered friends—the appliances of comfort, with which wealth has carpeted its own pathway to the tomb. Theirs is a perpetual struggle between the winner and the spender; and unless they are blessed at home, and happy in the consolations of religion, their life will be a joyless pearl—a weariness which ceaseth not—or, if there be a respite, it will be one which gives

"No blessed leisure for love or hope,
But only time for tears."

Let me remind you of *the pressure with which the ordinary evils of life fall upon the poor*. There is no part of the world where the curse has not penetrated. Man is born to trouble amid Arab horses and in Siberian wilds, as well as in royal courts and teeming cities. The cloud, like the sun, is no respecter of persons.

Everywhere disappointment tracks the footsteps, and sickness steals into the dwelling, and death waileth at the door. But these ills—common to all men—fall most heavily upon the poor. They have to bear the penalty in their condition, as well as in their experience. They cannot purchase the skill of many healers—the comforts which soothe the sickness—the delicacies which restore the strength. They cannot afford the time to recover thoroughly, for effort is required to keep ahead of the world; and to their quickened apprehension there are many visions of the wolf of hunger, glaring in through the panes of the uncurtained window. Their very maintenance is dependent upon contingencies which they can neither foresee nor control. Their prospects in life—their hopes for daily supply—their only chance of provision for emergency—are derived from their labour. That labour is contingent upon the state of trade—upon the measures of Government—upon the yield of harvest—upon the price of money—and sometimes even upon the thoughts, purposes, and quarrels of people whom they never saw, and from whom, perchance, they are separated by an endless waste of waters. If labour fails, bread fails—and hearts fail. The more provident can struggle for awhile upon the results of their thrift and care. But you can trace, if the scarcity be protracted, and if no friendly succours interpose, the inevitable progress downwards. The little savings, for which the industry of the past had toiled, and upon which the hopes of the future rested, are frittered away because of the need that will not wait. The cottage comforts vanish—and there is a

sickness at the heart as they go, for by long habit they have grown up into friends—the garments are scantier—the lines deepen upon the furrowed countenance. They sit broken-spirited and desponding, for their heart is melted within them because of trouble. One by one the articles of furniture disappear, until in extremest desolation the picture of the poet is realized—

“A shattered roof—a naked floor—
A table—a broken chair—
And a wall so blank, their shadow they thank
For sometimes falling there.”

Then sickness comes. The fever follows hard upon the famine. Through the noisome court the hot blast sweeps and the pure air flees away at its presence. The comfort is gone—the strength is gone—the hope is gone. Death has nothing to do but to take possession. They have neither power nor will to resist him. Not hopeful—but sadly, strangely, terribly indifferent—they await his approach. And if you tell them of their danger, they might answer in the strong words of the gentle spirit from whom we quoted before—

“But why do you talk of death—
That phantom of grisly bone?
I hardly fear his terrible shape—
It seems so like my own.”

And this is no fancy sketch, or midnight dream. There are homes of your fellow-countrymen, where the ruin is in progress to-day.

And now, brethren, what shall I more say? Putting aside didactic teaching, I have endeavoured to address you in one earnest and prolonged appeal. I have

based the claim of those for whom I plead on their common relationship, and on Divine commendation and command.

I have shown that God regards it as a spiritual service to give bread to the hungry—and “pure religion” “to visit the fatherless and widows.” I have tried to bring before you the circumstances which make the poor man’s lot the heavier. What remains but that we address ourselves to the duty of which we are all convinced, and which presses with so much weight of obligation upon the heart and conscience of us all. Our pity, our philanthropy, our patriotism, our religion, have opportunities of charity to-day.

The institutions for which we plead are noble monuments of Christian beneficence—such as are not reared except under the Gospel’s influence. But Christianity has taken the bodies as well as the souls of men under her charge—just as of old the sick were healed by the shadow of Peter passing by. Who but must be proud of our country, when we think of the vast and princely edifices which are our homes of national charity—or when we see the stricken poor crowding to the dispensary gates, and know that philanthropy has purchased for them the skill and the medicine, which they were too poor to buy? Then let our charity flow forth as it ought—undiminished by a solitary misgiving.

There are poor who are suffering. Let us earn the blessing of those who are ready to perish.

There are poor suffering more because they have striven not to show that they suffer — “giving”

royally "to charity, by refusing to take from it." Let us show them how high and warm is our appreciation of their generous self-denial.

There are Christ's godly people by thousands in distress and sorrow. Let us show them the reality of our religion—that its compassions fail not—and that its bowels of mercies yearn over a brother's trial.

There are infidels amongst these poor, who deny the Lord that bought them, and sneer at the hopes which to many of us are dearer than life. By the magnificence of our charity let us take our nobility of revenge.

The great duty of this morning is one from which none of you are exempt. God forbid that it should be the offering of the wealthy alone. The rich in their princely offerings—the comfortable in their cheerful sacrifices—the poor themselves in the large luxury of their little givings—we want them all. We await them all. We plead for them all.

Homes desolate because the breadwinner is away—children who have been pinched and pained so long that they have known nothing of the brightness of childhood—patient women, from whose hollow eyes the worm looks out already—men smitten from their manhood into feebleness—these are our clients. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"—this is our argument. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich"—this is our example. "She hath done what she could"—this is our measure.

“Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward.” “And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.” This shall be the exceeding great reward.

XXXVIII.

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP.

“For our conversation is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ : Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”—PHIL. iii. 20, 21.

“TELL me, art thou a Roman ?” It is a suspected criminal who is thus addressed by the individual who is charged for the time with the arbitration of his destiny ; and, while the cheek of the inquirer is clouded as with the shadow of an apprehended trouble, his eye lights up with a glance of pride and envy—“Tell me, art thou a Roman ?” Didst thou step easily into the heritage which it was so costly for me to attain ? It was my lifelong ambition to acquire the citizenship ; and at length the kindly drachmas countervailed the prejudice of alien birth ; but thou, of mean estate and evil fortunes—who seemest to have gathered around thyself the popular hate, and whom I have just sifted by scourging—art *thou* a fellow-heir of this world’s foremost privilege ? “With a great sum obtained I this freedom ;” did lavish nature favour thee in blood ? Then answered Paul—with frankness that was not alloyed by presumption ; with the dignity, but not the insolence, of patriotic pride—

"But I was freeborn." That must have been a constraining motive, which could induce the apostle lightly to regard this privilege, or to prefer to it the prospect of any other inheritance; and yet the faith, which had changed the current of his life, had sublimed his hopes as well; and in the text he speaks as the seeker after a country as yet invisible. His vaunt is—not that he is a Roman citizen, but—that his conversation, or citizenship, is in heaven. There he has laid up his chiefest treasure; and thither, as to their source of inspiration, his hopes and wishes fly.

In the chapter before us, Paul has been urging upon the Philippian church the comparative worthlessness of all human merit and ecclesiastical privilege without Christ—the necessity for a growth in knowledge and attainment which should be painstaking and continual—their greater obligation to consistency from the prevalent ungodliness around them; and then he sums up and enforces his argument by the words of the text, with their glorious presentation of the Christian's common heritage and hope: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." As if he had said: "It doth not beseem us to act as do the worldlings around us. The world is their theatre and their treasure-house; they look and live no higher. But we of nobler birth and higher expectations—listeners to a holy calling, waiters for the fruition of a cherished hope—let us free our-

selves from the trammels of such sensual bondage; let us be mindful of our rank and destiny, for 'our conversation is in heaven.'"

Brethren, the need for these exhortations has not ceased. The world, in which many of you mingle in the painful six-day toil—the ordinary cares of labour made a very drudgery by the fierce competitions of the time—is yet a power on the seventh, when another lordship should take possession of your souls; and there are none of you, who are so free from its influences of distraction or depression as to be above the chance of taint or need of warning. Let me remind you of your citizenship this morning, that you may be grateful as you remember its *source*, stimulated to discharge its *duties*, and comforted by the thought of the *immunities* which it confers.

I. Whence, then, is the source of this inestimable privilege? At the time these words were written, the Roman empire had attained the culmination of its power. By successive conquests its territorial possessions had been extended, and the might of its arms was acknowledged and dreaded in all lands over which its triumphant eagles flew. The long clamour of battle was hushed in the reign of Augustus. Arts and sciences flourished; the warriors, who had conquered Greece, had captured not its sons only, but its art—its architecture and its gods. The emperor seemed to reign over a consolidated and prosperous empire; and through each subject province, or far-off archipelago of isles, the man who could say, "I am a Roman citizen," found in the words his surest talisman

of safety, or his speediest redress for wrong. We cannot wonder that so substantial an inheritance should excite in those who had it the satisfactions of trustful patriotism; and in those who had it not, the covetousness of vehement desire. There were several ways in which this inheritance was devised to its possessors; and if you dwell for a moment upon the customs of Rome in this behalf, or even upon the customs of those ancient and venerable guilds which compose the livery of your own city, you may get illustrations which may help you to understand how the gift of this heavenly citizenship comes to be conferred upon men.

The first and highest inheritance of the citizenship was of course by *birth*. The sons and daughters of the family—when the parents were citizens—were free by hereditary transmission of privilege. So soon as they assumed the garb and the responsibilities of the man or the matron, they entered at once, as of right, and without effort or ceremony, upon their civic freedom. They were “freeborn.” It is hardly necessary to remind you that this is not the charter, by whose high prescription men become citizens of heaven. The race to which we belong has indeed a glorious heraldry. Our forefathers were of royal birth, and there are stray glances, even upon the countenance which sin has marred most foully, which give the shadow and memory of the Divine original. But we have long ago been disinherited in anger. Our first parents sold their birthright, and its estates have never been recovered; and we, who—if the test of Eden had been borne, and the righteous entail trans-

mitted—might have stood up in native strength and inherited the heavens by virtue of our purity of blood, are naturally homeless and poor—the children of trampled and unhappy slaves. We cannot boast as did the Jews to Jesus: “We be Abraham’s children, and were never in bondage to any man.” Serfs in a baser thrall than that of Egypt—banished ones in a more hopeless exile than that of Babylon—we cry because of the disquietude within us. “By nature we are children of wrath”—not heirs to unsearchable riches. If we anticipate the heavenly citizenship by virtue of our birth, we do but mock ourselves with a cruel dream, which will be dispersed, like other dreams, by the cold awakening light of morning.

Another mode of obtaining privilege was by *manumission* after faithful servitude, and as a reward for it. It was in the power of the master thus to confer, by a public ceremony in the presence of the officers of the State, the boon of freedom on the slave. The principle is recognised also in the mode of initiation by servitude into the corporations of modern times.

But neither is this the method by which men become citizens of heaven. It might have been achieved, perhaps, under the first covenant—when the heart was biassed, if at all, to godliness; when the temptations were all from without, and no headstrong passion warped the wavering will—but the sin, which closed Eden to humanity, infused into it a moral feebleness from which no human healer can recover it. Personal righteousness, justification by works, acceptance by patient but unaided merit, the propitiation of deed or suffering—they have been the attempt and

the failure of each succeeding age. From the time that Cain reared his altar, and Jezebel fasted in the intervals of her cruelty, and the priests of Baal stained with their own blood the russet turf of Carmel, and the Pharisee swept scornfully into the Temple, gathering from the contrition of the publican the material of his haughty prayer—men have clung lingeringly to this notion of personal merit, and have bribed themselves to believe that in another sense than that of Scripture they could “work out their own salvation.” But surely they must have poor conceptions of the breadth of the commandment, and scantiest knowledge of their own deceitful hearts, who could thus vainly feel and teach. Man, with his taint of native vileness and feebleness of moral power—living in a revolted province—pressed hard by banded foes and his own nature—in traitorous collusion with the enemy—man, to resist bravely the aggressions of evil, and to earn by stern and strong well-doing the citizenship of heaven! The thing were hopeless and impossible. Blot out the sun from the heavens—tame the chainless wind—put an interdict upon the laughing spring—melt the old mountains by a glance—draw a film of gossamer across the strand, and bid the roaring surf respect it—“bind the sweet influences of Pleiades” by a silken cord to an infant’s finger—but hope not, until the leopard change his spots and the Ethiopian his skin, that “they, who are accustomed to do evil,” can charm themselves into holiness and heaven. Were it possible to surround a man with all moral advantages, to seclude him carefully from vicious companionships and influences of evil, and to

impress him with the sincerities of an earnest heavenly desire, and then leave him to himself, without the presence and agency of the Divine, there would be that within him—a native warp, an inborn dislocation of soul—which would thwart his upward efforts and enslave him perpetually beneath the tyranny from which he panted to be free. Were you to ask of the holiest of your fellows, as he gasps with difficult life in the struggles of the latest agony, his testimony as to the foundation of his hope—his cheek would kindle with a glow which would master his convulsion, and make him for the moment insensible to pain, as he assured you that it was “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.”

If then the source of our heavenly citizenship is neither by birth nor by servitude, it can only be by *redemption*—purchased for us by One who loves us, who can pay the satisfying price, and can exert the needed power. And this is the marvel of love which has really been wrought on our behalf. We were sinners and Christ died for us. We were lying helplessly struggling against might which was too strong for us, crying passionately for deliverance, and Christ came with his Gospel—“the power of God to our salvation.” We were sold under sin—prostrate and agonized in the shame and bitterness of our slavery. Christ ransomed us by dying, and rose again to welcome us as the free. Brethren, nothing surely could make the citizenship a more precious privilege,

or invest it with a dearer charm. Let the worldling erect himself into the haughtiest stature of his pride, and refuse to accept a blessing for which he is indebted to the merit of another; the Christian is thrilled with a different and more grateful feeling. He sees the *love* of Jesus in the gifts which he confers, and therefore prizes them the more. Is it not a fact, of which your hearts are conscious, that the most prized of your possessions are those which are linked with some dear memory of home or friend? You are not insensible to property adventitiously acquired; you relish keenly the wealth which years of industry have earned; you repose complacent in the affluence wrung from sweat of brow or brain. But you have treasures dearer far than these. From secret drawer or hiding-place could be brought trifles, which would move the lip to quivering and charge the eyes with tears. There is a history in those trifles. They are shrines of treasured, ancient—perhaps of lost or buried—love. Some legend of the heart's past unfolds in that faded ribbon, or clusters round that well-worn volume, or waves in that light ringlet of carefully cherished hair. As you look at them, you see the forms which give them value—the gallant brother, as he left you on his latest voyage—the mother, when with tearful smile she placed the volume in your hand and bade you read it, with a blessing and a prayer—the winsome child who faded from your hapless care so soon. Oh, there is a wealth of fond attachment binding you to those dear gages of the past, which you do not care to conceal, nor yet to tell, and which subdues your spirit into a tenderness of which the manliest needs not be ashamed.

And so with the privilege of your Christian citizenship—"We love him because he first loved us." It has been purchased for us by our Saviour Jesus, and the gift is dearer for the Giver's sake. We feel burdened by no oppressive sense of obligation when we take gifts from him. The all-conquering, all-trusting love receives them as of course, and feels they could not come from dearer—and they would not come from other—hands. The peace of the Christian is sweeter because Jesus sends it. His hope brightens beneath the thought that it is Jesus who inspires it; and even as he thinks of the landscapes, and the waters, and the melody, in which human fancy may not unlawfully image forth the promised heaven, it is the Saviour's loving-kindness that is all his gratitude and all his song—

"These lively hopes we owe,
Lord, to thy dying love :
O may we bless thy grace below,
And sing thy power above !"

II. That the citizenship thus conferred upon us by the free love of Jesus entails duties upon all its possessors, is a consequence which each Christian heart will be prepared very cheerfully to recognise, as indeed it follows from every principle of right. Those, whom a State protects and advances, owe to it loyalty and patriotism; and if they fail in the discharge of duty, they forfeit all claim upon privilege. That is no true political or social teaching, whose talk is frequent of right and seldom of obligation. To a well-balanced mind the thought of responsibility will be co-ordinate

with the thought of benefit ; and the pulse of the commonwealth will not throb in the palace and the senate-house only, but in each hamlet and homestead of the land. It is a great error to suppose that the State is bound to grant privilege—equally to the rebel and the loyal—to the traitors who are disloyal to its government, or the selfish who are alien from its interests, as well as to the true spirits who have its weal at heart, or the volunteers who arm for its defence. As in human politics, so is it often in reference to the things that are Divine. There are many who would fain inherit the blessings, while they are indifferent to the obligations of the covenant, which God in his Son Christ Jesus has made with the children of men. But the immunities of Christian citizenship follow only upon the consistencies of Christian obedience : “ If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land ; ” and so deeply grateful is the heart of the believer, that he seeks opportunities by which his gratitude may be displayed, and is never so happy as when he wears the badge and bears the yoke of Jesus. Those, therefore, who have received this citizenship will carefully obey the laws and steadily watch over the interests of the kingdom to which they belong. Theirs will be neither stinted obedience, nor intermittent devotion. They will not refuse the laws which traverse them, nor help the ark only when interest prompts the deed. Their “ conversation will be in heaven ; ” and when they visit the habitations of men, they will be seen to reflect its glory. Their whole character will be radiant with the reflection of their heavenly communion, even

as the sunlight crimson the west. The zeal of God's house will consume them. "For Zion's sake they will not hold their peace, and for Jerusalem's sake they will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth;" and at last—as the stars die into the morning—they shall go to see the King in his beauty and dwell in his presence for ever.

Brethren, here is the test for you, by which to try your own state before God. Are you citizens or aliens? Does your heart recognise the breadth of the commandment and long to be conformed to its bidding? Does he that touches the ark, touch the apple of your eye? Do you yearn that the cause of Christ may prosper—preferring Jerusalem above your chiefest joy? Does it grieve you, when Zion languishes—when the archers shoot at Joseph—when the house of God lieth waste amid the ceiled houses in which the princes of this world dwell? Do you shrink from the testimony of Jesus? does the witness falter on your lips when you try to bear it before the worldly and the proud? or are you "bold to take up, firm to sustain, the consecrated cross"? Oh, who does not pray for the baptism from on high, that—purged alike from every feeling of disloyalty, and from every cowardice of shame—we may go forth, with subjugated hearts, to compass the subjugation of the world.

III. For true-hearted citizens there is abundant consolation in the immunities to which their citizen-

ship entitles them. They have a claim to the *protection* of the State in all circumstances of difficulty or need. The country is the father of all those who obey its laws, and pities and helps them, as a father pitieth his children. The man may be personally insignificant, and his oppressor may be a sceptred prince—but let the highborn wrong the lowly, and let the lowly place himself under the shadow of his country's flag, and he will find it mighty to redress or to avenge. And so the heavenly citizens may claim the protection of the land to which they have sworn their fealty, and to which their heedful footsteps tend. And how glorious that protection is! Over the heirs of grace angels have charge continually — “The Eternal God is their refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms:” “No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper;” and the all-conquering “Spirit shall lift up a standard” for their rescue, when the fierce onset of “the enemy cometh in as a flood.” O glad tidings to the weary and the wounded, who yet struggle manfully in the fight of faith. There is an eye over them, which never loses sight of their wanderings; there is a shield around them, which is never for a moment withdrawn. Courage, my flagging brother! The Lord is at thy right hand. Trust in him, and thou shalt never be moved. He will baffle the pursuit of thine enemies, and the alien armies shall be routed for thee by the lightning of his eye. Waves shall shrink from thee in fear, and fire refuse to scorch thee, and lions suspend their fierceness, and prison-gates stand open for thy flight; and as thou passest in triumph through the marshalled demons of

the pit, the utmost effort of their chained malice shall be but to gnash their teeth at thee in impotent rage.

Citizens have a claim also upon the *privileges* of the city to which they belong. Theirs are its security and its freedom, its wealth, its treasure, and its renown. Theirs is the historic pride of its storied past—theirs the inheritance of its chartered present—theirs the bright hope of its increasing future. From the head to the foot of the body politic, there vibrates a universal nerve—sensitive at the extremities as at the heart—thrilling as from a central temple to each far-off shrine, which pilgrim colonists have reared. There is a commonwealth of sympathy, and there is a commonwealth of claim. And so is it with the citizens of heaven. There is nothing in the charter from which any one of them is barred. To the meanest as to the mightiest “he will give grace and glory.” Here there are distinctions by the accidents of birth or fortune; there are cadets of great houses who depend largely upon noble patronage; there are portionless younger sons, who struggle through a mammon-loving age against the disadvantage of noble blood with straitened means;—but yonder there are no hereditary fortunes; where all is of grace, there is no inequality of advantage: and you—each of you—rich or poor—may become “heirs of God;” and oh, unequalled magnificence of giving! “joint heirs with Jesus Christ.” All the treasures of heaven—peace, that passeth understanding—joy, whose raptures are neither checked nor cease—fruition, which at once exhausts and exceeds the loftiest hopes of men—

communion, that knows no interval or end—light that fades not, save into the purer light—the love which makes a heaven of earth, and which makes a heaven of heaven—all that the heart can conceive of—blessing here, and recompense hereafter—“all are yours; for ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” Oh, live in the enjoyment of your inheritance; and while the sons of earth pride themselves upon their ancestral honours and blood-bought boon of freedom, “let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.” Here we see the true sphere for the progress and dignity of man. It is the boast of our country, that it throws no hindrance in the path of the poorest and meanest climber; that often “self-made men,” as they are somewhat proudly styled, have worn the rarest decorations and scaled the loftiest heights; and that genius, perseverance, and conduct have placed peasants’ sons at the tables of monarchs, and among the foremost men of the foremost nation in the world. But this is still more true of the citizenship with which God invests his children. Starting from a lower level—even from “the horrible pit and miry clay”—they attain a loftier elevation than ever ambition dreamed. They “grow up into Christ their living Head.” The Lamb leads them by living fountains of waters. They sit upon the throne by his side. Theirs is a song of melody which no angel-voice can learn; and through the ages of a rejoicing eternity, they reach out ever to increasing power, increasing knowledge, increasing holiness, increasing heaven.

XXXIX.

GLORIFYING GOD.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”—MATT. v. 16.

IN the last verse of the fourth chapter we read, “And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan;” and in the first verse of the fifth chapter, “And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him.” It would seem from these two statements, following each other, as they do, so closely and with somewhat of a relative sequence, as if the Saviour had felt that the great field of labour was ripe before the harvestmen were ready to reap it; that the harvest was plenteous, but that the labourers were unskilled as well as few. Some of the disciples had already been charmed to his side; and as he looked on them while they stood around him, the discrepancy between the mighty work and the mean instrumentality forced itself upon his notice, and the felt weakness of the agency constrained the commencement of that wondrous teaching, by which those simple-hearted listeners to a lore they knew not became, in after time, the powers that shook the world. The feebleness and

ignorance of spiritual things in the minds of those whom he had chosen, were the occasions of the Sermon on the Mount. It was addressed to *them* that, informed both in heart and understanding with its weighty truths, they might be qualified for their allotted labour as the fishers of men. But not to the disciples alone were spoken those words of warning and of promise. For us they sound ; for us upon whom the heirship of the ages has come, and who dwell in the fulness of time. Jesus is not in the mountain-pulpit now ; he hath gone upward, and the adorations of the upper temple greet him—but his words die not. Germinant they are, and fresh, and thrilling, with a young life in them, to stir our souls, and wake each holy thought and purpose, when the Spirit brings them nigh. Let us listen reverently to these words of the Lord Jesus to-day.

It was meet that he should commence with blessing. The habitual thoughts start freshest in the feeling ; the most familiar words come readiest to the tongue. After that bracelet of beatitudes, in which some have discovered a progression from the first poverty of spirit, which groans beneath a consciousness of need, to the assured confidence which blenches not at the prospect of martyrdom, he announces the two propositions which form the basis of the exhortation in the text—"Ye are the salt of the earth ;" "Ye are the light of the world." As salt is the great preservative by which bodies are kept from corruption, so Christians in a corrupt world are the vital antiseptic power ; as light is the great revealer and witness, so Christians in the gross darkness of a world lying in wickedness are the testifiers of the day-

spring from on high. But as salt must impregnate before it can preserve, and as light must be manifest before it can illumine—so the Christian, to fulfil his mission, must not be quiescent, but active ; not cowardly, but courageous ; not an anchorite, but a *man*. “ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

These words present us with

- I. *The primary and secondary purposes of a Christian life.*
- II. *The means by which they may be effectively fulfilled.*

I. The ultimate purpose of the Christian life, that to which all others must be subordinated, is the glory of God. This, indeed, is matter of necessity, and commends itself to all the proprieties of the moral sense, and to all the inductions of enlightened reason. God, as the Father of mankind, in which endearing term are included both his creative and governmental character, claims, and claims justly, the highest homage of the creatures he has made. For his own glory he made the world, peopled it with the tribes of the intelligent, enstamped upon those tribes the impress of his own likeness, and delegated to them, by the gift of moral freedom, a portion of his own power. For his own glory, when they had abused their liberty and destroyed themselves, did he build out of the ruins of the fall an architecture of still greater goodness, and redeem the race which he had before created and endowed. It is manifest then, that when the heart has listened to the great Teacher, and

has felt the power of his transforming spirit, there will be in it an instant and constant recognition of this highest duty; the obedient life will "do all to the glory of God;" the bursting hallelujahs of the heart's thankfulness will be all "to the praise of his glory." It constitutes, indeed, one main difference between those who are born, and those who are born again—that the one act, even in their most graceful and kindly things, from motives of external pressure, which this world bounds; while in the heart of the other, repressing and mastering all meaner springs of action, there is the desire to glorify God.

The essential glory of God—that which he had from the beginning—is incapable of increase or of change. It is, and was, and is to come, everlasting. It is only necessary, therefore, in order that our Father should be glorified, that his presence should be manifested in the sight of men. We can declare and exhibit, if we cannot increase, his glory. He is seen, and therefore glorified, in the order of creation. The sun in his tireless shining, the tides in their regular flow, the march of the solemn stars, the bountiful harvest, the measured and mighty hills—all show forth his power, and, in their eloquent silence, witness to their Creator's glory. He is seen, and therefore glorified, in the arrangements of providence. The perpetual presidency of the Divine in human affairs; revolution issuing in reconstruction; the social compact and the family joy; the numberless compensations which in their beneficent and equalizing action have almost the force and regularity of a law; the extraction of gladness from

suffering, and health from poison, and strength of soul from grinding and bitter trouble—all these contrivances of all-merciful Wisdom magnify the name of God the governor, and redound to the praise of his glory. And so in the work of redemption; in every instance of conversion, wrought by his Spirit through the atonement of his Son—when captive exiles hasten to be loosed and rejoice in a new enfranchisement; when those, who were radically and foully impure, exhibit a blameless and sin-mastering life, and persevere through all vicissitude to a heavenliness of character which fits them for a heaven of enjoyment—there is a glorifying of the “Father which is in heaven” transcending all beside, and stirring the seraph-minstrels into their highest ecstasies of praise.

This then is to be your steady purpose, in the daily forthputtings of your Christian life—to glorify God. Every question of casuistry must be settled by his will, every act consecrated by his blessing, all matters of earthly concernment judged of in the light of his throne. When the greater obligation comes into collision with the less, and passion and interest and friendship, and even earthly mandate, all point one way—while duty, distinctly perceived, lifts her solitary finger in another—the decided heart must acknowledge Divine supremacy and say, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” When temptation puts on a form of endearment or a robe of beauty, and the flesh is weak before the well-circumstanced sin—the victorious spirit, realizing the invisible, must say, “How can I do this great wickedness and

sin against God?" When the common things of life, the daily and ordinary matters, crave a rule of regulation and a standard of appeal, you will be at no loss to find it in the apostle's words: "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Subsidiary to this great purpose, and to contribute to its completer accomplishment, is *the Christian's walk before men*—"that they may see your good works." It is part of the design of God, touching the promulgation of his Gospel, that it shall be extended by human agency. In the first instance it was confirmed and spread by the authentication of miracle, but in perpetuity it is confided—never, of course, to the exclusion of Divine influence—to the use of means.

And God has so framed our nature, that we are uniformly and almost involuntarily receiving impressions from others. Our life is a series of dependencies. So subtle and so pervasive is the law of association, that it is influential even where we are hardly conscious of its existence. A chance word from a friend falling upon a nascent desire, like a spark upon tinder; the vision of a brave or wise one, held before the glass of the fancy until it has become the ideal of the heart's aspiring; or the music of some old-world rhyme, haunting the ear with a strange, creative melody—has evolved the tone of a spirit, and has fixed the direction of a life. The whole world is one unbroken chain of these actions and reactions. We are bound to them, compassed by them; and we can no more escape from them than we can cast ourselves

beyond the influence of the law of gravitation, or refuse to be fanned by the all-embracing air.

The design of God to use this mutual dependence for the spread of his Gospel is manifest from the facts—that the call of Cornelius, which might have been less troublesomely and more speedily accomplished by the angel who appeared to him in vision, was reserved until Peter had performed the journey from Joppa to Cæsarea; and that even in the conversion of Saint Paul, the human agency was honoured in the person of Ananias, “the certain disciple from Damascus.” And it is God’s method of procedure still.

For this end was instituted the grand ordinance of preaching, that the eternal truth might be commended to mankind in tones of kindred speech, ever-varying emotion playing on the face the while, and the soul’s deep sympathy thrilling in the utterances of the tongue. And in your own experience—the friend’s kind word or kinder life, how eloquent the sermon! how your frosted spirit melted from its savage winter as the warmth of a tender piety shone upon it! or how, like a rock against which the sea has dashed its frantic wave for ages, but which was shattered in a moment by the lightning, your prodigal heart—long wayward, and after years of hardening—was cleft asunder suddenly by the memory of some nursery hymn, or of some gentle mother’s prayer! As human nature is the same in all ages and in all conditions, the same effects will, by God’s blessing, continue to be produced, by human persuasion and example, to the end of time. What a solemn responsibility does this

entail upon each individual believer—indeed, upon each individual man! That stone, flung from careless hand into the lake, splashed down into the depths of the blue water, and that is all. No, it is not! Look at those concentric rings, rolling their far ripples among the reedy sedge, dipping the overhanging leaves of yonder willow, stirring the nest of the water-hen, and producing an influence, slight but conscious, to the shores of the lake itself. That heedless word, that word of haste or scorn, flung from my lips in casual company, made a momentary impression, and that is all. No, it is not! It deepened that man's disgust at godliness, and it sharpened the edge of the other's sarcasm, and it shamed that half-convinced one out of his penitent misgivings, and it had a slight, but determining, influence upon the destinies of an immortal life.

Oh, this is a terrible power that I have, this power of influence! and it clings to me; I cannot shake it off. It walks abroad with me, speaks, works, is powerful from my looks, through my tongue, in my life. I cannot live unto myself. I must be either a light to illumine, or a tempest to destroy; either an Abel, who, by his immortal righteousness, "being dead, yet speaketh," or an Achan, the saddest chronicle of whose otherwise forgotten name is—"And that man perished not alone in his iniquity."

Brethren, there is not one of you without this necessary element of power. Your sphere may be contracted, and your apparent influence small—but you have a sphere and an influence. "Let your light shine before men." The exhortation seems to refer

not so much to the active persuasion, as to the quiet exhibition of the light. It is not to flash *upon* the world for their perpetual rebuke—like a policeman's lantern turned suddenly upon a detected and affrighted criminal—it is to shine *before* men, a steady, inoffensive, but consistent and brilliant example; something which does not obtrude, but which is always manifest; which does not parade its influence, but which shines on with a serene goodness which the world, indifferent at first, will by and by gratefully acknowledge. This is the duty to which you are called to-day. Let your light shine, that men, won by its luminous and ardent flame, “may see your good works;” and, rising from the light-bearers into reverent and loving appreciation of their great original, may “glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

II. Perhaps the most profitable method of discovering our most effective mode of witness-bearing will be by pursuing the analogy of the suggestive and beautiful image in the text: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” We observe of Light—

1. That it is *derived*.

God is the great original of light. There was a time when it was not—when this world was a formless and unfurnished chaos, and darkness brooded over the face of the deep. It was the first-born of the creative work. “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” Light in all its forms and modifications may be traced up to this act of the great Creator,

“who made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night.” From the fountain of the sun all streams of light are flowing. Light is presented to us in ever-varying conditions, but it is the same light. There is a oneness in its essence. It is the same light which glitters from the wing of the fire-fly, and blazes from the ruddy hearthstone, and sparkles in the jewels of a diadem, and blushes in the beauty of the morning. Science tells us that the prolific coal-fields in the bowels of the earth were once forests of luxuriant vegetation on its surface, that they incorporated the sun’s rays, and were then in merciful convulsion imbedded in the lower earth by an all-provident foresight of the wants of a yet uninhabited world. Science tells us too, that when the shapeless crystal is freed from its crust of mud, and ground upon the wheel of the lapidary, and sparkles out upon our view as a diamond of the purest water, it is but the release of prisoned rays that were stolen from the same great source long centuries ago; so that both in the cottage firelight, and in the monarch’s gem, we have but the resurrection of some olden summer—the great Easter of sepulchred sun-light—from which man rolls away the stone. Whether this theory be true or not, it is certain that in our spiritual condition we are in darkness—all of us, in gross and utter darkness, until the true light shineth from on high. We have no native light, nor can we gather any from all the resources by which we are surrounded.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights,

with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" and alike for the implantation of the new nature, and for the power of resistance to evil and of growth in grace—alike for conscious pardon and for consistent testimony—we are dependent entirely upon God. Let this thought be fastened on our minds—"We have nothing that we have not received;" and it will restrain our rising arrogance, and impress us with the humility which becomes us before God. This humility all nature teaches us. There is no pride in light. The sun shines not haughtily. The brilliant host on high is unconscious of its own radiance. Day unto day uttereth speech, but it is speech of God. The heavens and the firmament boast not their own beauty and mechanism, but "declare *his* glory, and show forth *his* handiwork." The light hath an assigned mission, and hastes, noiseless and active, to fulfil it. Sunrise upon the mountains! when the morning, rising modestly from its couch of cloud, peers above the distant hills, and ever climbing into greater splendour, streams its light into the valley, and gazes, full-orbed, upon the world. In obedience to the tidal forces, the waves of ocean break upon the strand; but they break with great noise, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof; and of the world's grandest tones is the sea's majestic roar. But all around us, witnessed day by day, there are endless waves of light; a mightier force, of greater majesty and more rapid flow; a more brilliant and palpable type of the Divine: but there is no tumult in its march; it works in glorious silence, *that* silence "which is the energy of God." And thus,

unostentatiously but constantly, ought your light to shine before men. It is not *ye* that are to shine, but your light; all thought of self absorbed; all personal considerations subordinated to the one great endeavour to glorify God. The exaltation of self would tend only to the obscuration of the light, and would be one of the most effectual "bushels" to extinguish it. To the regulation and mastery of ourselves in this matter, the Scriptures earnestly exhort us. We are to "please all men for their good to edification," and yet the love of approbation must be repressed and subdued. The temple of our spirits must rise, shapely and consecrated, and the world must witness its rising; but there must be no ringing sound of human axe or hammer. Temptations to mingle ourselves with our Master in interest and reputation will assail us all. The man of narrowest sphere and smallest influence must be conscious of them, while those who are on the hill will feel the fierce blasts the more. The pride of honour; the pride of human applause; the pride which prides itself upon trampling upon this pride, as Diogenes with greater pride upon the pride of Plato; the pride of usefulness, or of conscious victory over evil, or of complacent rejoicing in the time of another's fall; the pride of the utter right—all these subtle and dangerous enemies *will* haunt our hearts, and whisper to us in our holiest services, twining themselves, like so many serpents, round the pillars of the sanctuary of God. Be it ours, brethren, to think so much of our Master that we have no room for thought of ourselves; to thrust the proud self into retirement, and hold forth the precious Saviour; and as the cynic, to whom we

have referred, made his solitary request to Alexander to forbear from intercepting the sunshine, let us—not in his spirit—banish all the proud and lofty imaginings which would intervene between us and the Sun of righteousness, that, receiving his directer light, we may stand in our humble happiness to bear witness of the light, and, in serene apocalypse, to manifest that light among men.

We observe—

2. *Light is self-evidencing and consistent.* Although we are neither to obtrude the light, nor ourselves—as in some sort its vehicle—we are not to hinder the light, nor distort, nor conceal, its rays. It is an essential property of light to shine. It is its own witness; it needs not any external testimony. Only let there be no obscuring intervention of foreign bodies, and the light will evidence itself in consistent and brilliant shining. How impartial it is! It hath no choice of places. There is no exclusiveness about it. It throws itself on the crest of the mountain, and the mists gather like a fleecy carpet at its feet; but it pierces into the grandest gorge or wildest glen, and dimples with a smile the face of the lonely tarn. It shines equally upon humble hut and bannered tower; and, with persevering beneficence, struggles through dirt and squalor to give glimpses of Heaven to the poor, and glints in through the loopholes of the dungeon to cheer the captive in his gloom. Under all circumstances, and through every hindrance, let the light alone and it will shine.

“Let *your* light so shine before men.” The light of Christian example is intended to be as consistent and

self-evidencing as the light of heaven. Once kindled in the heart, it ought to burn brighter and brighter, not with alternations of dimness, but steadily waxing into yet increasing lustre—"brighter and brighter unto the perfect day." The piety of a Christian should not be intermittent, now feverish with high excitement, and now feeble with unusual languor; it should be the calm and steady principle which has constant communion with God, and which, in evenness of display, exhibits the graces of the Holy Spirit before men.

This requirement of consistency condemns the indulgence in any disposition or practice, which would neutralise the testimony or damage the influence of the example. It condemns *worldliness*—sinful conformity to the maxims and fashions of men. Its high tone of morality abstains from the appearance of evil; indulges in no equivocal pursuit; and, in deep tenderness of conscience, brands the doubtful as the bad. It condemns *fickleness*, spasmodic activity or devotion; the continuity of the soul's earnestness only during seasons of excitement; life in the sanctuary, and lethargy at home; devoutness in the congregation, and dearth or death in the closet. It condemns *censoriousness*, the evil surmising of the heart; the pride which depreciates, or the envy which would injure, or the malice which conspires against, another. To it, in its elevation of holiness, the most hateful spirit is that of the Pharisee, who frowns off the publican from the fellowship of his devotion; and the most contemptible that of the wicked Haman, to whom court favour and riches availed not, so long as Mordecai the Jew was sitting at the king's gate.

It condemns *cowardice*, the hiding of the light under a bushel; the unworthy seclusion that would fain hoard religion in the heart, and, in isolation from all church fellowship, travel to heaven alone. All these, which have in their measure weakened the Church's influence and hindered the extension of the Gospel of Christ, are condemned by the exhortation—"Let your light shine." It must not be a phosphoric gleam, nor a meteor of the marsh, nor a revolving lantern—shedding an occasional or periodical radiance; but a light, equal and uniform, which shines on steadily through storm and calm. Its fitting emblem should be the lighthouse on the cliff.

"The startled waves leap over it; the storm
Smites it with all the scourges of the rain,
And steadily against its solid form
Press the great shoulders of the hurricane.
Steadfast, serene, immovable, the same
Year after year, through all the silent night,
Burns on for evermore that quenchless flame,
Shines on that inextinguishable light."

Thus—independent of circumstance, and faithful in witness—"let *your* light shine before men."

We observe—

3. *Light is a joyous thing.* "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." You cannot separate from the idea of light the ideas of beauty and warmth and gladness. The first ruby tint of the dawn upon the clouds, the golden glory of the noontide when sleeps the young summer in June, the purple splendour of the western sky as the sun hastes to his setting, the chaste gleaming of the queenly moon, the ruddy blaze of the fire in the ingle-nook of the home—all are beautiful, and are

suggestive both of comfort and of joy. And joyous as the light, should be the piety of the true believer. Who has such substantive reasons for happiness? Who grasps so many of the truest satisfactions of the spirit? Who, as he, can rejoice in tribulation and trust in trouble, because he inherits, in gladdening heritage, a present and future of blessing? The spirit of dark asceticism and of surly moroseness are alike foreign from the mind that was in Christ. They caricature our life-giving religion, and libel its boundlessness of love, who dolefully grieve, or fretfully complain; who are sanctimonious instead of sanctified; who weave wreaths of cypress for the brows of youth, and frown, in their melancholy censorship, upon the relaxations and endearments of life. Let the light shine, and these distorted views will melt before its warmth away. One feel of the sun will banish this moral dyspepsia; and the recovered heart, winsome in its faith and love, will shed a serene influence of goodness upon those around, so that they also may be charmed to Christ. Brethren, it is yours to exhibit this cheerful godliness before the world. The character of John the Baptist, as depicted in the words of the Saviour, is within the reach of all of you; and such a character—visible in the midst of it—the world cannot withstand. It has an eagle eye for the frivolous, the inconsistent, the unworthy; but even the eagle eye weeps before the sun, and its burning iris droops, abashed, before the purity of noon. "Let your light so shine"—the light of cheerfulness without frivolity, of benevolence without ostentation, of consistency without blemish, of holiness with humility

profound—that men “may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Thus fulfilling your mission, you shall have the recompense of the reward. Divine consolations will succour your manhood, and troop up, like ministering angels, to cheer the winter of your age; the last enemy shall be destroyed for you long before you enter into the mortal vale; and though your highest ambition would be gratified, were there to be chiselled as your epitaph—“He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light”—the Saviour, honouring the servant who has been faithful in a few things, shall give his attestation from the sky—

“He was a burning and a shining light.”

XL

THE CHRISTIAN'S DEATH, LIFE, PROSPECTS, AND DUTY.

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”—COL. iii. 2, 3, 4.

IN the former part of this delightful and valuable Epistle, the Apostle has been reminding the Colossians of their privileges, and the covenant blessings which they inherited in Christ. He tells them that they have entered upon a new dispensation; that the system of types and shadows has accomplished its purpose, and has been fulfilled; that their circumcision was of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; and that they were “complete in Christ, who is the head of all principality and power.” Lest, however, by these considerations, any of them should be exalted above measure, he urges them that they live unto God, tells them that, although freed from the yoke of ceremonial observance, their obligation to obey was as strict and as binding as ever; and though no longer impelled by slavish and spiritless fear, the love of Christ should constrain them to a closer evangelical obedience. There is no antinomianism, brethren, in

the Gospel ; it tells us that faith without works is dead ; that however largely it may talk about its knowledge of the better land, however it may imagine itself to be exalted through the abundance of its revelations, if it do not work by love and purity of heart, if it do not exert a transforming influence upon the character and life, there is no soundness in it, and it is but a specious and delusive mimicry of the faith which saves. The Apostle, in impressing this fact upon their minds, takes hallowed ground ; he seems to remind them of their privileges, that he may the more effectually insist upon their duty ; and for the grandeur of their blessings he urges their entire consecration to God. " If ye then be risen with Christ," if ye have emerged from the obscurity of the old dispensation unto the strength and beauty of the new, if ye have power over sin, if, by virtue of communion with your Saviour, ye are justified by faith, sanctified by the Spirit, and travelling to heaven, " seek those things that are above ;" be at home in heaven ; let your desires cluster there, and let there be a gathering of your hopes around the throne ; let your affections fasten upon that radiant seat " where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." He then repeats the exhortation, and assigns reasons for its performance, in the language of the text—" Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

There are four things presented to us in these words : the Christian's death, the Christian's life, the Chris-

tian's prospects, and the Christian's duty ; an ineffable blending of precept and promise, upon which, for a few moments, it may profit us to dwell.

I. The first thing that strikes us is the Christian's death. "For," says the Apostle, "ye are dead." Is not this somewhat of a paradox? Does not Christ say expressly that he came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them? Was it not one of the purposes of his coming that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly? Was it not one of the designs of his incarnation, that from the fountain of his own underived existence he might replenish the life of man, even to life everlasting? And yet, when we enter upon his service, the very first thing we are told to do is to die. Who shall solve the enigma? Only the Scripture, by becoming, as it always does, the authorized and satisfactory interpreter of itself. In St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy, you find this remarkable expression: "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." You have no difficulty in understanding that to mean dead in spiritual things. In that pleasure-loving heart there beats no pulse for God; in that spirit around which the world has flung the spells of its witchery, there is no desire for heaven; the pleasures of sense engross it; and, although compassed by the realities of the other world, it treats the very existence of it as a question or a fable. Now, just the reverse of this, morally considered, will explain to us the state of the Christian, when the Apostle tells us he is dead. The fact is, that between the flesh and the spirit there is a bitter and

irreconcilable enmity ; the one cannot exist in the presence and by the side of the other. That which has been garnished for the temple of the Lord must not be profaned by an idol. Distinct and solemn, and authoritative is the inspired announcement—"Whosoever will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God." Impiety has entered into an unholy compact to amalgamate these two, to adjust their claims, to give them a division of service ; but it is a covenant with death—it shall be disannulled ; it is an agreement with hell—it shall not stand. Religion peals out her refusal of such reluctant allegiance, lays the grasp of her claim upon the entire nation, and tells us in tones of power—"Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The Christian then, who is a Christian indeed, regards the world as if it were not, and continually endeavours to exemplify that his life and conversation are in heaven. His differences from the world may not, indeed, be apparent to a superficial observer ; he goes to and fro among the people like other men ; he takes an interest in the ever-shifting concerns that are passing in the world around him ; and yet he is dead to the world all the while. How are you to find it out ? Try him with some question of difficulty ; set his duty before him, and let that duty be painful, and let it involve some considerable deprivation of gain or of pleasure ; and, with self-sacrificing devotion, he will obey the truth, and glory in the trial. Mark him in the midst of circumstances of discouragement and woe, when waters of a full cup are wrung out to him ; he is sustained by an energy of which the world wotteth not, nerved with a principle to which it is an utter stranger ; richer

blood animates him, loftier inspirations sparkle from his eye; and though surrounded by the things of sense, and of course in some sort influenced by their impressions upon him, he tells you plainly that he seeks a country—nay, that he has already “risen with Christ,” and that he lives in the land which is at once his treasury and his home.

We may illustrate the Apostle's meaning again by a reference to another passage; that in which he speaks of “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.” The primary reference of the Apostle is to the sufferings, which himself and his compatriots were called upon to undergo in attestation of the resurrection of Christ. The enemies of the cross, those who were doing their utmost to destroy Christianity, were preplexed and baffled by the disappearance of the Saviour from the tomb; and to account for the mystery, they charged the Apostles with the felony of their master's body. Thus two statements were put forth directly opposite in character and tendency; the rulers said the body was stolen; the Apostles said the body had risen. The latter could not be disproved; but so intense was hostility against the Nazarene, that persecution and power were made use of—compendious, but, happily in this case, ineffectual arguments—to silence the proclaimers of the truth. The Apostle refers to this in the words that are now before us, and tells them in effect that though famine might draw the fire from his eye, and long-continued suffering might repress and undermine the buoyancy of his spirit, and though his flesh might creep and quail beneath the pressure of these agonies, and though in all these ways

he might bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus—yet, by the patience with which those sufferings were borne, by the consolations which abounded in the midst of them, nay, by the fact of the sufferings themselves, he could point to his marred and shattered body, and say that not the dying only, but the life of Jesus was every moment manifested there.

But we are not disposed to limit this bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus to apostolic times. It is not a thing of one generation merely. We are not now called upon, as were our fathers, to do it in the furnace; the fires of outward persecution have well-nigh forgotten to burn; but it has an existence still as actual and as constant as in days of yore. The Christian does so every moment of his life, because every moment of his life he exercises faith in Christ. And his faith is not only active and appropriating, but realizing in its tendency: it not only unfolds to him the riches and confers on him the blessings of the mighty offering; it paints it as a living vision before the eye of his mind. Darting back through two thousand years of past time, it places him in the midst of the crowd gathered at the crucifixion, ay, at the very foot of the cross. He sees the victim; there is no delusion in the matter; he walks along the thronged and bustling streets; men cross his path in haste, speeding away—the one to his farm and the other to his merchandise; he converses with a thousand beings, he transacts a thousand things; but that scene is ever before him. As the magnet of his highest attractions, his eye always trembles to the cross, and in the midst of evidence fresher every moment he joins,

in the centurion's language, his glad language too—"Truly this man was the Son of God." With such a spectacle as that before him, how can he live unto the world? With the glances of so kind an eye constantly beaming upon him, how can his desires be on earth? Heaven claims him, for his treasure and his heart are there. Nay, so entirely does this death unto sin—for I suppose you have found out that that is what we mean—take possession of the Christian, that, as the Apostle in another place expresses it, he is "crucified with Christ." He is not only an anxious spectator, he is something more—he is a living sacrifice. He has his cross. As Christ died for sin, he dies to sin, and they both conquer by dying. As by the dying of the Saviour the power of death was destroyed, and the world was freed from his dominion, so by the dying of the sinner the principle of evil is dethroned, the new heart is gained, and the man becomes "a new creature in Christ Jesus."

This is what we imagine the Apostle to mean when he says of Christians, "Ye are dead;" and as it is only when we have thus died that we can be truly said to live, allow us to ask you, if you are thus dead unto sin and alive unto God? Have you realized this death unto sin, or this birth unto righteousness? Has this deep abiding change passed upon you? Or are you still living to the world, the circle of this life your bounded prospect, and its fleeting enjoyments your only reward? Examine yourselves, brethren, and may the Spirit help you to a right decision!

II. We pass upward from the truth of death to the

truth of life. "For ye are dead," says the Apostle, "and your life"—a life that you have notwithstanding that seeming death—"is hid with Christ in God." In the creation of God there seems to be nothing absolute or final; everything seems rather in a rudimentary state, a state in which it is susceptible of increase, development, expansion, improvement. It is so in nature. The seed is cast into the earth; years elapse before there are the strength and shadow of the tree. The harvest waves not in its luxuriant beauty at once; "there is first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." And what is thus possible in the ordinary processes of nature is capable of spiritual analogies. Man ends not in his present condition. The very imperfections with which it is fraught shadow forth a mightier being. It would seem as if glimpses of this great truth shot across the minds of the sages of ancient Greece and Rome. It is interesting to watch their minds in their various and continual operations—especially when, as it were, brought out of themselves, to see them struggling with some great principle just glowing upon them from the darkness of previous thought, to see them catching occasional glimpses of truth in the distance, and pressing forward, if haply they might comprehend it fully. It must have been in one of those very ecstasies that the idea of immortality first dawned upon them; for, after all, crude and imperfect as their notions were, they must be regarded rather as conjecture than opinion. It was reserved for Christianity, by her complete revelations, to bring life and immortality to light—to unfold this master purpose of the Eternal

Mind, and to give permanence and form to her impressions of the life that dies not. You remember that the inspired writers, when speaking about the present state of being, scarcely dignify it with the name of life, compared with the life to be expected ; but they tell us there is provided for us, and awaiting us, a life worthy of our highest approbation, and of our most cordial endeavour—a life solid, constant, and eternal. This is the promise “ which he hath promised us ”—as if there were no other, as if all others were wrapped up in that great benediction—“ this is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life ; ” and of this life they tell us that it is “ hid with Christ in God.”

It is hidden, in the first place, in the sense of secrecy. It is concealed—partially developed ; we do not know much about it. Revelation has not been minute in her discoveries of the better land. Enough has been revealed to confirm our confidence and to exalt our faith. The outlines of the purpose are sketched out before us, but the details are withheld. Hence, of the life to come the Apostle tells us, that “ we know in part, we see as through a glass darkly ; ” through a piece of smoked glass like that through which we look at an eclipse of the sun. Our senses can give us no information concerning it, for it is beyond their province ; reason cannot find it out, for it baffles her proudest endeavours. We may go to the depth in search of this wisdom : “ the depth saith, It is not in me.” Imagination may plume her finest pinion, and revel in the ideal magnificence she can bring into being ; she may so exalt and amplify the images of the life that is, as to picture forth the life that will be. It is a hidden life still, for

it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive it; shadows dense and impervious hang on its approach, clouds and darkness are round about its throne. Experience can teach us nothing respecting it. None of those white-robed companies, who have enjoyed this life from the beginning, have been commissioned to explain to us its truths; none of those now venerable ones, who have travelled the road, who have experienced the change, have returned. They come not, full fraught with the tidings of eternity, to tell to the heedful multitudes tales from beyond the grave. Those dark and silent chambers effectually cut off all communication between the mortal and the changed. We may interrogate the spirits of the departed, but there is no voice—not even the echo of our own. We do not complain of this secrecy, because we believe it to be a secrecy of mercy. The eye of the mind, like the eye of the body, were dazzled with excess of light; and if the full realities of the life to come were to burst upon us, we should be dazzled into blindness; there would be a wreck of reason, and the balance of the mind's powers would be irrecoverably gone. Moreover, "we walk by faith, not by sight;" and a fuller revelation would neutralize some of the most efficient means for the preservation of spiritual life, and bring anarchy and discord into the beautiful arrangements of God. Thus is this hiding beneficial to believers. Yes, and I will go further than that: to the sinner it is a secrecy of mercy. Wonder not at that. Imagine not, that if this vacant area could be filled to-day with a spirit of perdition—with the thunder scar of the Eternal on his brow, and his heart writhing under

the blasted immortality of hell—then surely if he could tell the secrets of his prison-house, those who are now among the impenitent would be affrighted, and repent and turn. I tell you nay; for “if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

Just another thought here on this head. Especially is this life hidden in the sense of secrecy, in the hour and the article of death. An awful change passes upon one we love, and who has loved the Lord Jesus Christ. He looks pale and motionless; we see not the glances of his eye, we hear not the music of his voice, and as he lies stretched breathless in his slumbers, it is very difficult to believe that he is not dead. But he “is not dead, but sleepeth.” Can you credit it, O ye mourners? Is there no chord in your stricken hearts, ye bereaved ones, that trembles responsive to the tone, “he is not dead, but sleepeth”? His life is with him yet as warm, and as young, and as energetic, as in days gone by; only it is hidden “with Christ in God.” We mourn you not, ye departed ones who have died in the faith, for ye have entered into life. Natural affection bids us weep, and give your tombs the tribute of a tear—but we dare not recall you. Ye live; we are the dying ones; ye live in the smile and blessing of God. Our life is “hid with Christ in God.”

And then it is hidden, secondly, not only in the sense of secrecy, but in the sense of security—laid up, treasured up, kept safely by the power of Christ. The great idea seems to be this: the enemy of God, a lion broken loose, is going round the universe in search of the Christian's life, that he may undermine and

destroy it; but he cannot find it; God has hidden it; it is hidden with Christ in God. It is a very uncertain and precarious tenure, upon which we hold all our possessions here. Everything connected with the present life is fleeting; plans formed in foresight and executed in wisdom are, by adverse circumstances, rendered abortive and fruitless; gourds grow for our shade, and we sit under them with delight; the mildew comes, and they are withered; friends twine themselves around our affections, and as we come to know them well and love them, they are sure to die; and upon crumbling arch, and ruined wall, and battlemented height, and cheeks all pale that but a while ago blushed at the praise of their own loveliness, old Time has graven in the word of the preacher—that there is nothing unchangeable in man except his tendency to change. But it is a characteristic of the future life, that it is that which abideth; the lapse of time affects not those who live eternally; theirs is immortal youth; no enemy, however organized and mighty, can avail to deprive them of it; no opposition, however subtle and powerful, can wrest it from him with whom it is secure. Where is it hidden? With Christ; the safest place in the universe, surely, for anything belonging to Christ's people. Where he is, in that land irradiated with his presence, and brightening under the sunshine of his love; on that mountain, whose sacred inclosure God's glory pavilions, and within which there shall in no wise enter anything that shall hurt or destroy. Where is this hidden? In God, in the great heart of God, who is never faithless to his promise, and whose perfections are pledged to confer it upon

persevering believers. Oh, we will not fear. Unbelief may suggest to us its thoughts of suspicion and warning; fear may shrink back appalled from a way so untried and dangerous; passion may stir our unruly elements in our too carnal minds, and presumptuously fight against our faith; our ancient enemy may do his best to aggravate into intenser force the giant war—but we will not fear; our life shall be given to us, for it is hidden with Christ in God. Even now, in the prospect, we feel a joy of which the world wotteth not—heart-warm, fervent, entrancing—a joy, which we may suffer to roam unchecked in its raptures because it is based upon the truth divine.

III. We pass on, thirdly, to the Christian's prospects—"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

These words imply two things: first, enjoyment; and secondly, manifestation.

They imply, first, enjoyment. We observed before, that revelation has not been minute in her discoveries of the better land; we have the outlines of the purpose before us, but the details are withheld; and yet enough is revealed not merely to fulfil, but to exalt our highest hopes. The similitudes, under which the recompense is presented in Scripture, cannot fail to fill us with anticipations of the most delightful kind. It is brought before us, you remember, as an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled; as a paradise ever vernal and blooming—and, best of all, amid those trees of life there lurks no serpent to destroy—as a country, through whose vast region we shall traverse with untired foot-

steps, while every fresh revelation of beauty will augment our knowledge, and holiness, and joy; as a city, whose every gate is of precious stones, whose every street is a sun-track, whose wall is an immortal bulwark, and whose ever-spreading splendour is the glory of the Lord; as a temple, through which gusts of praise are perpetually sweeping the anthems of undying hosannas; above all, as our Father's house where Christ is—where our elder brother is, making the house ready for the younger ones—where all we love is clustered, where the outflowings of parental affection thrill and gladden, and where the mind is spell-bound, for aye, amid the sweet sorceries of an everlasting home. Is there no enjoyment in images like these? Does not the very thought of them make the fleet blood rush the fleeter through the veins? And yet these and far more are the prospects of the Christian: knowledge without the shadow of an error, and increasing throughout eternity; friendship that never unclasps its hand, or relaxes from its embraces; holiness without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; the presence of God in beatific and imperishable vision, combine to make him happy each moment, and to make him happy for ever.

Then these words imply manifestation as well as enjoyment. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." The world says—"You talk about your life being hidden; the fact is, it is lost; it is only a gloss of yours to say it is hidden." But it is not lost, it is only hidden; and when Christ, who has it, shall appear, "then shall ye also appear," to the discomfiture of

scoffers and to the admiration of all them that believe—"then shall ye also appear with him in glory." The worldling looks at Christians now, and, in some of his reflective moods, he finds a great difference between them, but it is a difference he can hardly understand. With his usual short-sightedness, and with his usual self-complacency, he imagines the advantage to be altogether upon his own side; he looks at the outside of the man, and judges foolish judgment. Perhaps he glances at his garments—they are tattered, it may be, and homely—and he turns away with affected disdain. Ah! he knows not that beneath that beggar's robe there throbs a prince's soul. Wait a while; bide your time; stop until the manifestation of the sons of God. With what different feelings will earth's despised ones be regarded at the bar of judgment and before the throne Divine! How will they appear when they are confessed, recognized, honoured—in the day when he is ashamed of the wicked, and when the hell beneath and the hell within will make them ashamed of themselves? "Beloved," says the rejoicing Apostle, "now are we the sons of God;" that is something, that is no mean gift, that is no small bestowment, to have that in hand; "now are we the sons of God." It is a small thing to take a captive out of a dungeon, and turn him loose upon the cold world's cruel scorn. But it is a grand thing to take a captive out of a dungeon, and set him on a throne; and that is done with all those who believe on Jesus: being justified by faith, they have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. "And if children" (for they have received the adoption of sons), "then heirs, heirs of God, and

joint-heirs with Christ." Oh! the grand, the august, the stately splendour, the sonship, which is given unto those who put their trust in Christ. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be"—so transcendent, so surpassing is the recompense, that we cannot conceive it now. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be;" it doth not yet appear even to ourselves; we shall be as much astonished at the splendour of the recompense as any one beside. Oh! when we are launched into the boundless, when the attentive ear catches the first tones of heaven's melody, when there bursts upon the dazzled eye the earliest glimpse of beatific vision, how shall we be ready almost to doubt our own identity—"Is this I? It cannot be the same. Is this the soul that was racked with anxiety and dimmed with prejudice, and stained with sin? Is this the soul whose every passion was its tempter, and that was harassed with an all-absorbing fear of never reaching heaven? Why, not an enemy molests it now; not a throb shoots across it now; those waters that used to look so angry and so boisterous, how peacefully they ripple upon the everlasting shore; and this body, once so frail and so mortal—is it, can it be, the same? Why, the eye dims not now; the cheek is never blanched with sudden pain; the fingers are not awkward now; but, without a teacher, they strike the harp of gold, and transmit along the echoes of eternity the song of Moses and the Lamb." This is conjecture, you say;—not, we hope, unwarranted;—but even now, dark as our glimpse is, unworthy as our conceptions are of the promised recompense, there is

enough to exalt us into the poet's ecstasy, when throned upon his own privilege, he sings :

“ On all the kings of earth
With pity we look down ;
And claim, in virtue of our birth,
A never-fading crown.”

IV. And now then you are ready for the duty, I am sure. “ For your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” “ Set your affection on things above.” Oh ! how solemnly it comes, with all this exceeding weight of privilege to back it ! It silences the question urged, it overrides gainsaying ; it is emphatic and solemn, and to the Christian resistless. “ Set your affection on things above.” For a Christian to be absorbed in the gainfulness of the world, or fascinated by its pleasures, is at once a grievous infatuation and a sin. It is as if a prince of high estate and regal lineage were to demean himself in the haunts of beggars, to the loss of dignity and imperilling the honour of his crown. What have you, the blood-royal of heaven, to do with this vain and fleeting show ? Arise, depart ; this is not your rest ; it is polluted. And yet how many of you have need of the exhortation this morning, “ Set your affection on things above ” ! Have you not—now let the spirit of searching come unto you—have you not, by your cupidity, avarice, and huckstering lust of gain, distanced the world's devotees in what they had been accustomed to consider their own peculiar walk ? Have you not trodden so near the line of demarcation between professor and profane, that you have almost trodden

on it, and almost trodden it out? Have you not, strangely enamoured of visions of distant joy, postponed, as uninfluential and unworthy, the joy that abideth? or, like the man in the allegory, raked up with a perseverance that in aught else might have been laudable, the straws beneath your feet, while above your head there glittered the diadem of glory? Oh, awake! arise! this is not your rest; it is polluted. "Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth." If riches be your possession, be thankful for them; do all the good with them you can. If friends make music in your dwelling, regard them as rose-leaves scattered upon life, and by and by to drop from life away. Seek for bags that wax not old, friends that neither weep nor change in the unintermitting reunions of heaven's own glory.

How does this prospect of glory breathe encouragement to the soul in the sad season of bereavement! "He that believeth in Jesus"—this is the promise—"though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth on Jesus shall never die." Still sounds that great utterance of the Master, running along the whole line of being, heard over the graves of the loved—amid rustling leaf, and fading flower, and withering grass, and dying man—"He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Orphan, believest thou this? Widow, from whom the desire of thine eyes has been taken away with a stroke, believest thou this? Ah! some of us have friends safe-housed above the regions of the shadow and the storm, but we would not bring them back again. We would sing for them the hallowed pæan:

“ By the bright waters now thy lot is cast,
Joy for thee ! happy friend ; thy bark hath pass'd
The rough sea's foam.
Now the long yearnings of thy soul are stilled,
Home, home !
Thy peace is won, thy heart is filled !
Thou art gone home.”

But we can listen to the voice, which they find time to whisper to us, in some of the rests of the music—
“ Be ye therefore followers of us who now, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises.”

Some of you have not got, perhaps, to the realization of this promise yet. There is a misgiving within ; there is a yet unsettled controversy between your Maker and yourself. You have not seen Jesus ; you have not heard the pardoning voice, or felt the power of the reconciling plan. Oh ! come to Christ. To-day the Holy Spirit of Christ is here, waiting to take of the precious things of Christ, and to show them unto you ; waiting this morning to do honour to Jesus. Hallow the consecration of this house by the consecration of the living temple of your hearts. God is no longer the unknown God—to be viewed with servile apprehension, or followed with slavish dread. He is God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. Redemption is no longer a theorem to be demonstrated, a problem to be solved, a riddle to be guessed by the wayward and the wandering. It is the great fact of the universe, that Jesus Christ hath, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man. Mercy is no longer a fitful and capricious exercise of benevolence ; it is the very power, and justice, and truth of God. A just God : look that out in the Gospel dictionary, and you

will find it means a Saviour. Heaven is no longer a fortress to be besieged, a city to be taken, a high impregnable elevation to be scaled; it is the grand metropolis of the universe, to which the King, in his bounty, has thrown up a royal high-road for his people, even through the blood of his Son. Oh, come to Jesus with full surrender of heart, and all these blessings shall be yours.

Some do not hold this language; they belong to this world, and are not ashamed to confess it. "Bring fresh garlands; let the song be of wine and of beauty; build fresh and greater barns, where I may bestow my fruits and goods." But then cometh the end. "The rich man died and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments; and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said"—the only prayer that I know of, the whole Bible through, to a saint or angel, and that by a damned spirit, and never answered—"Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." Listen to it—the song of the lost worldling in hell. Who will set it to music? Which heart is tuning for it now? Sinner, is it thine? Is it thine? Don't put that question away. Ask yourselves and your consciences in the sight of God, and then come, repent of all your sins, flee for refuge to the hope that is laid before you in the Gospel, trusting in serene and child-like reliance upon Christ. Only believe, and yours shall be the heritage in the world to come.

XLI.

THE APOSTLE'S GROUND OF TRUST.

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”—PHIL. iii. 7, 8.

THERE can be no sense of bondage in the soul when the tongue utters words like these. Albeit they flow from the lips of a prisoner, they have the true ring of the inner freedom, of the freedom which cannot be cribbed in dungeons. They are the expressions of a far-sighted trust which yields to no adverse circumstances, which endures, as seeing him who is invisible, in the confidence of quiet power. There was a very tender relationship subsisting between Paul and the Philippian Church. They had sent Epaphroditus to visit him in his prison at Rome, to bear him their sympathies, and to administer their liberality, in his hour of need ; and in return for their kindness, and as a token of his unfailing love, he addressed to them this Epistle. It is remarkable that it contains no solitary word of rebuke, that it recognizes in them the existence of a grateful and earnest piety, and that it aims throughout at their consolation and encouragement. In the commencement of the present

chapter he warns them against certain Judaizing teachers, who would fain have recalled them to the oldness of the letter, and who made the commandments of God of none effect by their tradition. "Beware of dogs, beware of evil-workers, beware of the concision." He tells them that the true seed of Abraham—the royal heritors of the covenant—are those who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. He proceeds to remind them that if there were benefit in external trusts, he stood upon a vantage-ground of admitted superiority. "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." But, putting all this aside, renouncing these grounds of confidence as carnal and delusive, resting in sublime reliance upon Christ, he records the noble declaration of the text—at once the enduring testimony of his own faith and the perpetual strength of heirs: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

We can conceive of no testimony better calculated than this to cheer the timid, or to confirm the waver-

ing, to silence the misgivings of the doubtful, or cause the inquiring soul to sing for joy. All the conditions which we can possibly desire in order to render testimony accredited and valuable, are to be found here. It is not the utterance of a man of weak mind—infirm of purpose and irresolute in action—whose adhesion would damage rather than further any cause he might espouse. It is Paul, the Apostle, who speaks, the sharp-witted student of Gamaliel, a match for the proudest Epicurean, versed in scholastic subtilties and in all the poetry and philosophy of the day, with a mental glance keen as lightning, and a mental grasp strong as steel. It is not the utterance of youth, impassioned, and therefore hasty; sanguine of imagined good, and pouring out its prodigal applause. It is Paul, the man, who speaks, with ripened wisdom on his brow, and gathering around him the experience of years. It is not the utterance of the man of hereditary belief, bound in the fetters of the past, strong in the sanctities of early education, who has imbibed a traditional and unintelligent attachment to the profession of his fathers. It is Paul, the sometime persecutor, who speaks, the noble quarry which the arrows of the Almighty struck down when soaring in its pride. It is he who now rests tenderly upon the cause, which he so lately laboured to destroy. It is not, finally, the utterance of inexperience, which—awed by the abiding impression of one supernatural event, and having briefly realized new hopes and new joys—pronounces prematurely a judgment which it would afterward reverse. It is Paul, the aged, who speaks, who is not ignorant of what he says and whereof

he doth affirm, who has rejoiced in the excellent knowledge through all the vicissitudes of a veteran's life—alike amid the misgivings of a Church slow to believe his conversion, and amid the dissipation and perils of his journeys—alike when first worshipped and then stoned at Lystra, in the prison at Philippi, and in the Areopagus at Athens—alike when in the early council it strengthened him, “born out of due time,” to withstand to the face of Peter, the elder Apostle, because he was to be blamed, and when, melted into almost womanly tenderness on the sea-shore at Miletus, it nerved him for the heart-breaking of that sad farewell—alike when buffeting the wintry blasts of the Adriatic, and when standing, silver-haired and solitary, before the bar of Nero. It is he of amplest experience who has tried it under every conceivable circumstance of mortal lot, who, now that his eye has lost its early fire, and the spring and summer are gone from him, feels its genial glow in the kindly winter of his years. Where can we find testimony more conclusive and valuable? Hear it, ye craven spirits, who would dastardly forswear the Master, and let it shame you into Christian manhood? Hear it, ye bruised and tender souls, that dare hardly venture faith on Jesus, and catching inspiration and courage from it let your voices be heard:

“Hence, and for ever from my heart,
I bid my doubts and fears depart,
And to those hands my soul resign,
Which bear credentials so divine.”

In the further exhibition of this passage to-night, we ought to refer, in the first place, to the Apostle's

insufficient grounds of trust—and secondly, to the compensating power of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. I greatly fear, however, that the first part of the subject will be all that I can manage to compass within the time allotted for this evening's service. Our remarks will therefore mainly dwell upon the grounds of trust which the Apostle here repudiates—"What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."

There is something remarkable in the way in which the Apostle refers to the past, and the respectful manner in which he speaks of the faith of his fathers, and of his youth. It is often a sign rather of servility than of independence, when men vilify their former selves. The Apostle had not renounced Judaism in any moment of passion, nor in any prejudice of novelty. Strong convictions had forced him out of his old belief. He had emerged into a faith purer and far more satisfying. But there were memories connected with the fulfilled dispensation, which he would not willingly let die. There were phases of his own inner life there. For long years Judaism had been to him his only interpreter of the divine—the only thing which met a religious instinct, active beyond that of ordinary men. The grounds of trust which he now found to be insufficient, had been the halting-places of his soul in its progress from the delusive to the abiding, from the shadowy to the true. He could not forget that there hung around the system he had abandoned, an ancient and traditional glow. It was of God's own architecture; the pattern and its gorgeous ceremonial had been given by himself in the mount; all its furniture spoke of

him in sensuous manifestation and magnificent appeal. His breath had quivered upon the lips of its prophets, and had lashed its seers into their sacred phrensy. He was in its temple service, and in its holy of holies ; amid shapes of heavenly sculpture, the light of his presence ever rested in merciful repose. How could the Apostle assail it with wanton outrage or flippant sarcasm ? True, it had fulfilled its mission, and now that the age of spirituality and power had come, it was no longer needed ; but the halo was yet upon its brow, and like the light which lingers above the horizon long after the setting of the sun, there shone about it a dim but heavenly splendour. While, however, the Apostle was not slow to confess that there was glory in that which was to be done away, he was equally bold in affirming its absolute worthlessness in comparison with the yet greater glory of that which remained—"What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." It will be found, I think, to be remarkable in the review of the grounds of trust, which the Apostle here repudiates, how much there is kindred to them in the aspects of modern faith, and how multitudes now cling to them with tenacity, and hope to find in them their present and eternal gain. Let us remind you then, for a few moments, of the catalogue of trusts which the Apostle tried and repudiated.

The first thing he mentions is sacramental efficacy—"Circumcised on the eighth day." He names circumcision first, because it was the early and indispensable sacrament of the Jewish people, the seal of the Mosaic covenant, the distinguishing badge of the Israelites from all other nations of mankind. Moreover, he tells

us he had the advantage of early initiation—"Circumcised the eighth day." The Gentile proselytes could, of course, only observe the rite at the period of conversion, which might be in manhood or in age. But Paul was hallowed from his youth—from the eighth day of his life introduced into the federal arrangement, and solemnly consecrated to the service of the Lord. He was not insensible to this external advantage, but he does not hesitate to proclaim it worthless as a ground of acceptance with God.

There are multitudes by whom baptism is regarded in the same reverent light, as was circumcision by the Jews of old. If they do not absolutely rejoice in it—as the manner of some is—as the instrument of their regeneration, at least they have a vague notion of a benefit which they deem it to have conferred, and are living on the unexhausted credit of their parents' faith and prayer. If, in adult age, they make any profession of religion, it is by partaking of the Eucharist, whose elements they invest with mystic and transforming power. There is no inward change in them. They are conscious of no painstaking and daily struggle with corruption. They have no conflict for a mastery over evil. No perceptible improvement passes upon their conduct and habits from their periodical communions. And yet, absolutely, their only hope for the future springs from the grace of the baptismal font, and from the efficacy of the sacramental table; for they persuade themselves into the belief, that as by the ordinance of baptism there was a mysterious conveyance to them of the title-deeds of an inheritance, so by the excellent mystery of the Lord's Supper they

are as inexplicably ripened into meetness for its possession. Brethren, we would not undervalue the ordinances of God's appointing. We are not insensible to the benefit when believing parents dedicate their offspring unto God—when the hand of parental faith rests upon the ark of the covenant, and claims that there should be shed out upon the little ones the spiritual influences of the Holy Ghost. Chiefest among our religious memories, treasured in the soul with a delight which is almost awe, are some of those holy communions, when—the life infused into the bread, the power into the wine—Christ has been evidently set forth before his grateful worshippers, and strong consolations have trooped up to the heavenly festival. But it must not be forgotten that all the graces of ordinances, all the beatific and inspiring comforts which flow through divinely appointed services, are not in the services themselves, but in the fulness of the loving Saviour—the anointed one in the vision of Zechariah, without whom and without whose Spirit they could have neither efficacy nor power. Precious as are the collateral benefits of baptism, and hallowing as are the strength and blessing of the Holy Eucharist, we do solemnly proclaim them worthless as grounds of acceptance before God. Hear it, ye baptized but unbelieving members of our congregation! Hear it, ye devout and earnest communicants! Sacraments have no *atoning* virtue—no value at all except as avenues to lead the soul to Christ; and if, in a trust like this, you pass your lives, and if, in the exercise of a trust like this, you die, for you there can remain nothing but the agonizing wakening from a deception

that will have outlasted life, and the cry wailed from the outside of a door, for ever barred—"We were early dedicated unto thee! were accounted as thy followers; we have eaten and drunk in thy presence; Lord, Lord, open unto us." That is the first ground of trust which the Apostle here disclaims.

Passing on in the catalogue, we find that the second repudiated confidence is an honoured parentage—"Of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews." To have been circumcised the eighth day, proved that he had been born of parents professing the Jewish faith; but, inasmuch as the Gentile proselytes also observed the rites of circumcision, it did not prove that he had been descended of the family of Israel. He therefore shows that in purity of lineal descent, in all those hereditary honours upon which men dwell with pride, he could boast with the proudest of them all. He was of the stock of Israel. But ten of the tribes had revolted from their allegiance to Jehovah, had soiled their nobility by their vices, had entered into degrading companionship with surrounding idolaters. He therefore reminds them further, that he was of the tribe of Benjamin; illustrious, because it had given the first king to Israel; more illustrious, because, at the apostasy of Jeroboam, it maintained purity of Divine worship, and held itself faithful among the faithlessness of many. Moreover, he had not been introduced into the federal relationship by personal adoption, nor by the conversion of his fathers. There had been in his ancestry no Gentile intermarriages; he was "a Hebrew of the Hebrews." His genealogy was pure on both sides. There was no

bar sinister in his arms. He was a lineal inheritor of the adoption, and the glory, and the covenant. There was much in all this, on which in those times the Apostle might have dwelt with pride. Men generally vaunt those honours which are theirs by birth.

It was surely then no light thing to belong to nobility that could trace its far descent from the worthies of the older world—to have for his ancestors those anointed and holy patriarchs who trod the young earth when unwrinkled by sorrow, undimmed by crime, untouched by the wizard wand of time—to have in his veins the same blood that marched proudly over the fallen ramparts of Jericho, or that bade the affrighted sun stand still at Gibeon, or that quailed beneath the dread thunders of the mount that burned. And yet all this accumulated pride of ancestral honour the Apostle counted “loss for Christ.” That the Jews prided themselves on their descent from Abraham, you may gather from many passages of Scripture. You remember when our Saviour was conversing with them on the inner freedom, he was rudely interrupted with the words—“We be Abraham’s children; we were never in bondage to any man.” And that they regarded this descent from Abraham as in some sort a passport to heaven, we may gather from the Saviour’s rebuke—“Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” And there are multitudes now, brethren, who have no better hope than this. There are many in this land of ours, who are stifling the misgivings of conscience, and the convictions of the Holy Spirit,

with the foolish thought that they have been born in a Christian country, surrounded with an atmosphere of privilege, or are the sons "of parents passed into the skies."

Look at that holy patriarch—forsaken of kindred, bankrupt in property, and slandered in reputation, "afflicted grievously and tempted sore"—and yet holding his integrity as fast in his sackcloth as ever he did in his purple, and amid terrible reverses blessing the goodness which but claimed the gift it gave! Mark that honourable counsellor—pious amid cares of state, and pomps, and pleasure—walking with God amid the tumult and luxury of Babylon, and from the companionship of kings speeding to his chamber that had its lattice open towards Jerusalem! Listen to that preacher of righteousness—as now with earnest exhortation, and now with blameless life he testifies to the whole world, and warns it of its coming doom, and then, safe in the heaven-shut ark, is borne by the billows of ruin to a mount of safety. What sublime examples of consistency and piety are here! Surely, if a parent's faith can avail for children anywhere, it will be in the families of Noah, Daniel, and Job!

Now, listen—listen—ye who rest on traditional faith, ye who are making a raft of your parents' piety to float you over the dark, stormy water into church fellowship here, and into heavenly fellowship hereafter—listen to the solemn admonition: "Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God." Alas! if the grandson of Moses was an idolatrous priest; if the children

of Samuel perverted judgment and took bribes; if David, the man after God's own heart, mourned in hopeless agony over Absalom dead; how sad the witness that religion is not a hereditary possession! how appalling the danger lest you, children of pious parents, nursed in the lap and surrounded with the atmosphere of godliness, should pass down into a heritage of wrath and sorrow, aggravated into intenser hell for you by the remembrance of the piety of your fathers! That is the second ground of trust which the Apostle disclaims.

Passing on in the catalogue, we find that the next repudiated confidence is religious authority. "As touching the law, a Pharisee." This was not the first time the Apostle had made this affirmation. You remember that before the tribunal of the high priest he affirmed, with a not unholy pride—"I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee." And, at Agrippa's judgment-seat, he appealed even to the infuriated Jews whether he had not, according to the straitest sect of their religion, lived a Pharisee. And, indeed, there was much in those early times, which an honest Pharisee might be excused for counting gain. The word has got, in our days, to be regarded as a sort of synonym for all that is hypocritical and crafty; but a Pharisee in the Jewish times—an honest, earnest Pharisee—was a man not to be despised. In an age of prevailing indifference, the Pharisee rallied around him all the godly religious spirit of the time. In an age of prevailing scepticism, the Pharisee protested nobly against the freethinking Sadducee, and against the courtly Herodian. In an age of prevailing laxity, the Pharisee

inculcated—by precept, at all events—austerity of morals and sanctity of life. There might be ostentation in his broad phylacteries; at all events, it showed he was not ashamed of the texts which he had traced out upon the parchment. A love of display might prompt the superb decorations with which he gilded the tombs of the prophets; at all events, and that is no small virtue, he had not ceased to honour the memory of righteousness. There might be self-glory in his fasts, rigidly observed, and in his tithes, paid to the uttermost farthing; at all events, there was recognition of the majesty, and obedience to the letter of the law. I repeat it, in those early times there was much which an honest Pharisee might be excused for counting “gain.” But this also the Apostle “counted loss for Christ.”

There are multitudes now, I need not remind you, whose trust is their orthodoxy, whose zeal is their partisanship, whose munition of rocks is their union with the people of God. There is some danger, believe me, lest even the tender and hallowed associations of the Church should weaken the sense of individual responsibility. We are apt to imagine, amid the round of decorous externalisms, when the sanctuary is attractive and the minister approved—when there is peace in the borders and wealth in the treasury—when numbers do not diminish, and all that is conventionally excellent is seen—that our own piety must necessarily shine in the lustre of the mass, that we are spiritually healthy, and need neither counsel nor warning.

The Church to which we belong, perhaps, has “a name to live;” and we imagine that the life of the

aggregate must, in some mysterious manner, imply the life of the individual. And though our conscience reproach us sometimes—though we are frivolous in our practice, and censorious in our judgment of others—though, in our struggle with evil, the issue is sometimes compromise and sometimes defeat—though attendances at religious ordinances, an occasional and stifled emotion under a sermon, a spasm of convulsive activity, a hurried and heartless prayer, are really the whole of our religion—we are sitting in our sealed houses, we pass among our fellows for reputable and painstaking Christians, and are dreaming that a joyous entrance will be ministered to us abundantly at last. Oh, for thunder-pealing words to crash over the souls of formal and careless professors of religion, and startle them into the life of God! I do solemnly believe that there are thousands in our congregations, in different portions of the land, who are thus dead while they are seeming to live; and with all fidelity I would warn you of your danger. It is a ghastly sight, when the flowers of religious profession trick out a mortal corpse. It is a sad entombment, when a church or chapel is the vault of the confined spirit, “dead in trespasses and sins.” That is the third ground of trust which the Apostle here disclaims.

Passing on in the catalogue, we find that the fourth repudiated confidence is intense earnestness—“Concerning zeal, persecuting the Church.” There was much in this that would awake a responsive chord in the heart of a bigoted Jew. The Apostle tells us he was present at the martyrdom of Stephen; and in his zeal for the repression of what he deemed to be a profane

mystery, he made havoc of the Church, breathed out threatenings and slaughter, and persecuted unto death. Often, indeed, did the sad memory press upon him in his after life, bowing him to contrition and tears. "I am less than the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God." But there is incontestable evidence in all this of his zeal for the Jewish faith, that he did not hold the truth in unrighteous indolence, but that he exerted himself for its promulgation ; that devotion with him was not a surface sentiment, nor an educational necessity, but a principle grasping, in the strong hand of its power, every energy of his nature, and enfibred with the deepest affections of his soul. And there was much in all this, which men around him were accustomed to regard as "gain ;" but this also he esteemed "as loss for Christ."

I know no age of the world, brethren, when claim for the gainfulness of zeal, abstract zeal, would be more readily conceded than in the age in which we live. Earnestness—it is the god of this age's reverence. Men do not scrutinize too closely the characters of the heroes they worship. Mad ambition may guide the despotic hand ; brain may be fired with dark schemes of tyranny ; the man may be a low-souled infidel, or a vile seducer ; he may be a poet stained with licentiousness, or a warrior stained with blood ; let him be but earnest, and there is a niche for him in the modern Pantheon. And, as it is an understood principle that the character of the worshippers assimilates to the beings they worship, the devotees have copied their idols ; and this is an earnest age. The trade spirit is

in earnest ; bear witness, those of you who have felt its pressure. Hence the unprecedented competitions of business ; hence the gambling, which would rather leap into wealth by speculation than achieve it by industry ; hence the intense, the unflagging, indomitable, almost universal greed of gain. Men are earnest in the pursuit of knowledge. The press teems with cheap, and not always wholesome, literature. Science is no longer the heritage of the illuminati, but of the masses. The common mind has become voracious in its appetite to know ; and a cry has gone up from the people which cannot be disregarded—"Give us knowledge, or else we die." It is manifest in all departments and in every walk of life. Men live faster than they used to do. In politics, in science, in pleasure—he is, he must be, earnest who succeeds. He must speak loudly and earnestly who would win the heedful multitudes to listen. Such is the impetuosity of the time, that the timid and the vacillating find no foothold on the pavement of life, and are every moment in peril of being overborne and jostled aside, trampled down beneath the rude waves of the rushing and earnest crowd.

While such general homage is paid to earnestness, what wonder if some people should mistake it for religion ; and if a man should imagine that because he is zealous in the activities of benevolence, warmly attached to certain Church organizations, and in some measure sympathetic with the spiritual forces which they embody, he is really a partaker of the undefiled religion of the Bible ? And I must go further than this. The tolerance—take it to yourselves, those who

need it—the tolerance with which believers in Christ—those who are really members of the Church, and have “the root of the matter” within them—the tolerance with which they talk about and apologize for “the zealous but unconverted adjuncts of the Church,” tends very greatly to confirm them in their error. Cases throng upon one’s memory and conscience as we think upon the subject.

There is a man—he has no settled faith at all in the principles of Christian truth; he is cast for ever upon a sea of doubt and darkness; “ever learning, yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” He may consider without acting till he dies. But what says the tolerant spirit of the age? “He is an earnest thinker—let him alone; he has no faith in the Bible; he has no faith in anything certain, settled, and indisputable—but he is an earnest thinker; and, although life may be frittered away without one holy deed to ennoble it, if he live long enough, he will grope his way into conviction by and by.”

There is another man; he is not all we would wish him to be; he is unfrequent and irregular in attendance upon the ordinances of God’s house; he is not always quite spiritually-minded; we should like to see him less grasping in his bargains; but he is an earnest worker, a zealous partisan, an active committee man, and we hope all will be right with him in the end.

There is another man, and more chivalrous in his sense of honour; he is known to hold opinions that are dangerous, if not positively fatal, upon some vital subjects of Christian truth. But he is an amiable man; he is very kind to the poor; he has projected several

measures of amelioration for their benefit; the widow blesses him when she hears his name. He is an earnest philanthropist; and, thus sheltered in the shadow of his benevolence, his errors pass unchallenged, and have a wider scope for mischief than before.

I do solemnly believe, that there are men who are confirmed in their infidelity to Christianity by the tribute thus paid to their zeal. It may be that some infatuated self-deceivers pass out of existence with a lie in their right hand, because earnestness, like charity, has been made to "cover a multitude of sins." Since there is this danger, it is instructive to find out what is the Apostle's opinion of mere earnestness. It may be a good thing—there can be no doubt of that—when it springs from prompting faith and constraining love, and when the object on behalf of which it exerts its energies is intrinsically excellent. It is a noble thing; we cannot do without it; it is at once a pledge of sincerity and an augury of success. It may be a good thing, but it may be a blasphemy; just the muscle in the arm of a madman, that enables his frantic hand to scatter firebrands, and arrows, and death. But do not deceive yourselves.

Divers gifts may have been imparted to you; you may have discrimination of the abstruse and the profound; the widow may bless your footsteps, and the orphan's heart may sing for joy at your approach; the lustre of extensive benevolence may be shed over your character; opinions may have rooted themselves so firmly in your nature, that you are ready to suffer loss in their behalf, and to covet martyrdom in their attestation, giving your body to be burned. But, with

all this earnestness, indisputably earnest as you are, if you have not charity, diviner far—if you have not “faith that works by love and purifies the heart”—earnest, indisputably earnest as you are, it profiteth you nothing; your confidence will fail you in the hour of trial; its root is rottenness, and its blossom will go out as dust. That is the fourth ground of trust that the Apostle here disclaims.

Yet again, and finally. The next ground of trust is ceremonial blamelessness—“Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” The Apostle’s zeal for the Jewish faith was rendered more influential by the purity of his life. There are some whose zeal is but a cloak for licentiousness, and who shamefully violate, in daily practice, the precepts of the religion for which they contend. But the Apostle was not one of those impious fanatics; he had been in sincerity and truth a Jew—so rigid and inflexible in his adhesion to the laws of Moses that he was esteemed a pattern, and rejoiced in as a pillar of the truth. Not that before God the most devout Pharisee had anything whereof to glory—but that in the eye of men, who judge in short-sightedness, and who judge in error, he passed for a reputable and blameless man. And this, also—the most ordinary, the most widespread ground of false confidence—the Apostle counted “loss for Christ.”

I need not remind you, I am sure, how deep in the heart of man, resisting every attempt to dislodge it, self-righteousness lurks and broods; and how men come to regard themselves—in the absence of atrocious crime, and in the presence of much that is humanizing and

kindly—as ripening for the kingdom of heaven. And it is no marvel—I do not think it one jot of a marvel—if we consider what the usages of society are, and the verdicts which it passes on the virtues and vices of the absent.

There is a tribunal among men that never suspends its sessions—that is always “measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves,” and so is “not wise.” From acting as judge in some of these arbitration cases of character, by acting as an arbiter himself, the man comes to know the standard of the world’s estimation, and how it is that it comes to its decisions; and, in some reflective mood possibly, he tries himself by it, and, looking down below him, he sees, far beneath him in the scale, the outcast and the selfish, the perfidious, the trampler upon worldly decencies, and the scandalously sinful. And then he looks into his own case, and he sees his walk through life, greeted with the welcome of many salutations—his name passing unchallenged, his integrity vouched for among men. Then he looks into his own heart, and finds it is vibrating to every chord of sympathy; friends troop around him with proud fondness; children “climb his knees, the envied kiss to share.”

It is no marvel, I say, if a man accustomed to such standards of arbitration, should imagine that the goodness which has been so cheerfully acknowledged on earth, will be as cheerfully acknowledged in heaven; and that he who has passed muster with the world so well will not be sent abashed and crestfallen from the judgment-seat of God.

And there is nothing more difficult than to rouse such a one from his dangerous and fatal slumber. There are many who, thus building on the sand, have no shelter in the hour of the storm. You may thunder over such a man's head all those passages which tell of the radical and universal depravity of our race. Yes, and he admires your preaching, and thinks it is wonderfully good for the masses—but *it has no sort of application to him*. He does not feel himself to be the vile and ungodly creature you describe; he has an anodyne carried about with him to silence the first misgiving of the uneasy conscience, and he lies down in drugged and desperate repose. There are many who continue in this insidious deception, and are never aroused except by the voice of the last messenger, or by the flashing of the penal fires. That is the last ground of trust which the Apostle disclaims.

And now of the things that we have spoken, what is the sum? Just this. You may be early initiated into the ordinances of the Christian Church; you may have come of a long line of spiritually illustrious ancestry, and be the sons "of parents passed into the skies;" you may give an intellectual assent to the grand harmony of Christian truth; you may be zealous in certain activities of benevolence, and in certain matters connected even with the Church of God itself; you may have passed among your fellows for a reputable and blameless man, against whom no one would utter a word of slander, and in whose presence the elders stand up in reverence, as you pass by; and yet, there may pile upon you—(O God, send the word home!)—there may pile upon you all the accumulation of carnal

advantage and carnal endowment; you may gain all this world of honour—and lose your own soul. “And what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

I have no time, as I imagined, to dwell upon the compensating power of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. There is this compensation, however: “What things were gain to me,” says the Apostle, “those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” This compensation runs through creation. It seems to be a radical law both in the physical and spiritual government of God. You see it in things around you. A man climbs up to high place, and calumny and care go barking at his heels. There is beauty, dazzling all beholders, and consumption, “like a worm i’ the bud, preying upon its damask cheek.” There is talent, dazzling and enrapturing, and madness waiting to pounce upon the vacated throne.

Oh yes, and there is a strange and solemn affinity too, in the Bible, between crime and punishment. I can only indicate just what I mean. The Jews rejected Christ, perseveringly rejected Christ; and one of their pleas, you remember, was—“If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar’s friend;” and to conciliate the Roman power, they rejected Christ. That was their crime; what was their punishment? The Romans did come, by and by, and “took away their place and nation.” Pharaoh issued his enactment, that all the male children of Israel should be drowned: that was the crime; what was the punishment? Pharaoh and

his host were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea by and by. Hezekiah took the ambassadors of Babylon through the treasure-chambers of silver and gold, ostentatiously showing them his wealth : that was the crime ; what was the punishment ? The treasures of silver and gold went off captive to Babylon by and by. David, in the lust of his power, took the census of the people, and numbered them : that was the crime ; what was the punishment ? The pestilence fell upon the people whom David had numbered, and dried up the sources of the strength in which he had boasted so fondly.

And—just to remind you of another case—who are those who are represented as standing at the barred gate of heaven, knocking, frantic and disappointed, outside, and crying, in tones of agony that mortal lips cannot compass now, thank God ! “ Lord, Lord, open to us.” Who are they ? Not the scandalously sinful, not those who on earth were alien altogether—outcast altogether—proscribed altogether from the decencies and decorum of the sanctuary of God. No ; those who helped to build the ark, but whose corpses have been strewed in the waters of the deluge ; those who brought rafters to the tabernacle, but who, as lepers, were thrust out of the camp, or as transgressors, were stoned beyond the gate ; those who, on earth, were almost Christians ; those who, in the retributions of eternity, are almost saved ; beholding the church on earth through the chink of the open door, watching the whole family as they are gathered, with the invisible presence and the felt smile of the Father upon them ; beholding the family as they are gathered, beatific, and

imperishable, in heaven—but the door is shut. Almost Christians! almost saved! Oh! strange and sad affinity between crime and punishment. What is your retribution to be? “Every one shall receive according to the things he has done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be bad.”

Oh! come to Christ—that is the end of it—come to Christ. Hallow this occasion by dedicating yourselves living temples unto the Lord. He will not refuse to accept you. Mark the zeal with which the Apostle Paul proclaimed the truth: mark the zeal, the love, indomitable and unfailing, with which he clung to the Master—“I determined to know nothing among men but Christ, and him crucified.” Oh! rare and matchless attachment; fastening upon that which was most in opprobrium and in contumely among men. Never did the earnest student of philosophy, as he came away from some Socratic prelection, utter his affirmation, “I am determined to know nothing among men save Socrates, and him poisoned;” never did enraptured youth listen to the persuasive eloquence of Cicero, and utter his affirmation, “I determined to know nothing among men save Cicero, and him proscribed.” But Paul takes the very vilest brand of shame, and binds it about his brow, as a diadem of glory: “I determine to know nothing among men but Christ, and him crucified.” Yes, that is it, “Christ, and him crucified.” “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross.” In the cross is to be our chiefest glory.

Trust that cross for yourselves; take hold of it; it is consecrated. In all circumstances of your history,

in all exigencies of your mortal lot, take firm hold of the cross. When the destroying angel rides forth upon the cloud, when his sword is whetted for destruction, clasp the cross ; it shall bend over you a shield and a shade ; he will relax his frown, and sheathe his sword, and pass quickly and harmlessly by. When you go to the brink of the waters, that you are about to cross, hold up the cross ; and by magic power they shall cleave asunder, as did ancient Jordan before the ark of the covenant, and you shall pass over dry-shod, and in peace. When your feet are toiling up the slope, and you arrive at the gate of heaven, hold up the cross ; the angels shall know it, and the everlasting doors shall unbar themselves, that you may enter it. When you pass through the ranks of applauding seraphim, that you may pay your first homage to the throne, present the cross, and lower it before the face of the Master, and he, for whose sake you have borne it, will take it from you, and replace it with a crown.

XLII.

THE EFFECTS OF PIETY ON A NATION.

“And he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten’s sake.”—GEN. xviii. 32.

MOST remarkable and most encouraging is this instance of prevailing prayer. It might well stimulate us to the exercise of sublimer faith, when we behold a mortal thus wrestling with Omnipotence, wrestling with such holy boldness that justice suspends its inflictions, and cannot seal the sinner’s doom. Passing over that, however, with all the doctrines it involves, there is another thought couched in the text, to which, at the present time, I want to direct your attention. The history of nations must be regarded by every enlightened mind, as the history of the providence of God. It is not enough, if we would study history aright, that we follow in the track of battles, that we listen to the wail of the vanquished and to the shout of the conquerors; it is not enough, that we excite in ourselves a sort of hero-worship of the world’s foster-gods, the stalwart and noble peerage of mankind; it is not enough, that we trace upon the page of history the subtile and intricate developments of human character. To study history aright, we must

find God in it; we must always recognise the ever-present and the ever-acting Divinity, working all things according to the counsel of his benevolent and holy will.

This is the prominent aspect in which history ought to be studied, or grievous dishonour is done to the Universal Ruler, and intense injury is inflicted upon the spirits of men. God himself, you remember, has impressively announced the guilt and danger of those who regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operations of his hands. The history of ancient Israel, for instance—the chosen people, led by the pillar of cloud by day, and by the pillar of fire by night, through the marching of that perilous wilderness, what was it but the successful development, in a series of wondrous deliverances, of the ever active providence of God? There were some things in that history, which of course were incapable either of transfer or of repetition; but the history itself included, and was ordained to set forth, certain prominent principles for the recognition of all nations—principles which were intended to assert the rights of God, and to assert the obligations of his creatures—principles which are to be consummated in their evolution amid the solemnities of the last day. It was so in the case of Sodom, punished as an example to God's chosen people. Their transgressions had become obduracy, their obduracy had blossomed out into punishment; but a chance in the Divine government yet remained to them:—peradventure there might have been ten righteous in the city. If there had been ten righteous in the city, those pious men would have

been the substance, the essence, the strength of the devoted nation ; for them—on their account, for their sakes—the utter ruin of the land might have been averted ; and through them, after the Divine displeasure had passed by, there might have sprung up renewed strength and recovered glory. We may fairly, I think, take this as a general principle—that pious men, in all ages of the world's history, are the true strength of the nations in which, in God's providence, they are privileged to live ; oftentimes averting calamity, oftentimes restoring strength and blessing, when, but for them, it would have lapsed and gone for ever. This is the principle which I purpose, God helping me, to apply for a moment to our own times, and to the land in which we live. And in order to give the subject a practical character, I will, in the first place, paint the pious men, and then show the effect which the consistent maintenance of a course of piety may be expected to ensure.

I. In the first place, who are the pious men ? Who are they whom God, who never judges in shortsightedness, who sees the end from the beginning, and who cannot possibly be deceived or mistaken in his estimate of human character—who are they whom God designates “the holy seed that shall be the substance thereof” —the pious men that are the strength of the nations in which they live ? In order to sustain the honourable appellation which is thus assigned, men must cultivate habits of thought and of practice that are appropriate to such a character. I will just mention two or three particulars.

First, they are pious men who separate themselves avowedly and at the utmost possible distance from surrounding wickedness. Men are placed under the influence of religion, in order that they may separate from sin, in order that they may be governed by habits of righteousness and true holiness. In times when depravity is especially flagrant, there is a special obligation upon pious men to bring out their virtues into braver and more prominent exercise—regarding that surrounding depravity as in no wise a reason for flinching, or for cowardice, or for compromise, but rather for the augmented firmness of their purity. Now it cannot for one moment be doubted, that in the times in which we live iniquity does most flagrantly abound. There is not a sin which does not exist, and exists in all rankness and impurity. Because of swearing the land mourns. God's Sabbaths are systematically desecrated, his sanctuaries contumeliously forsaken, his ordinances trampled under foot, his ministers met with the leer oftentimes due to detected conspirators, and regarded as banded traitors, who have conspired against the liberties of the world. The lusts of the flesh scarcely affect to conceal their filthiness—everywhere unveiling their forms, and everywhere diffusing their pestilence. We do not venture upon any sort of comparison; we do not venture to compare the aggregate depravity of this age with the depravity of any age that has preceded. We only affirm the general fact, that the heart of man is "deceitful and desperately wicked," and that the depravity we see around us—the exhibition of the carnal mind, "which is enmity against God"—is most

fearfully aggravated by the abundance of privilege by which the people are surrounded. Now it is the duty, I repeat, of those who would have God to estimate of them as pious men, that they should regard this depravity as invoking them to bear the testimony of unsullied and spotless holiness. Let the exhortations on this matter which are scattered throughout the pages of the Bible be solemnly pondered. "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." "Abstain from all appearance of evil." In times when depravity is especially flagrant, do not even borrow of the garments of falsehood; do not let there be any meretricious semblance of that which is hateful in the sight of God. Abstain from the appearance of evil. Come out of it so thoroughly that the fellowships and intercourse of social life do not seduce you into a sort of complicity. "Be not partakers of other men's sins. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove." "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? and what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" "Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

You will not fail to perceive that the whole of these passages have one aim and one summons, and that is holiness—holiness as spotless in the secrecy of individual consciousness, as in the jealous watch of

men—holiness shrined in the heart, and influencing benignly and transformingly the entire character—holiness that is something more chivalrous than national honour—holiness, something that maintains a higher standard of right than commercial integrity—holiness, something that is more noble-minded than the conventional courtesies of life—holiness which comes out in every-day existence, hallowing each transaction, taking hold of the money as it passes through the hand in ordinary currency, and stamping upon it a more noble image and superscription than Cæsar's—holiness written upon the bells of the horses and upon the frontlet of the forehead—an immaculate and spotless lustre beaming, so to speak, from the man in daily life, so that the world starts back from him, and tells at a glance that he has been with Jesus. Now, brethren, it is to this, to the exercise and maintenance of this unflinching holiness, that you are called. Here is the first prominent obligation of pious men. You are to confront every evil with its exact and diametrical opposite; and he who, in circumstances like these in which we stand, ventures to hesitate, or ventures to parley—brand him as a traitor to his country, a traitor to his religion, and a traitor to his God.

Secondly, if you would be what God regards as pious men, you must cultivate firm attachment to the doctrines of Christian truth. There is, brethren, in our day a very widely-diffused defectiveness of religious profession, a very widely-diffused departure from the faith that was "once delivered to the saints." This is a Christian country. Men call it so, I know; but

there is in daily practice a strange and sad departure from the precepts of Christianity—ay, on the part of men by whom the theory of this being a Christian country is most noisily and boisterously maintained.

Are you strangers to the presence in the midst of us of the dark and subtile spirit of unbelief?—a venal press and active emissaries poisoning the fresh blood of youth, disheartening the last hope of age, and which, if their own account of the circulation of their pernicious principles is to be relied upon, has already tainted hundreds of thousands with that infectious venom whose poison lies not in the destruction of the body? True, it is, for the most part, bland, conciliatory, plausible, rather than audacious and braggart—as in former times, veiling its deadly purpose in song or in story. But the dagger is not the less deadly, because the haft is jewelled; and infidelity is not the less infidelity, not the less pernicious, not the less accursed, because genius has woven its stories to adorn it, and because fancy has wreathed it into song.

Are you strangers to the avowed denial on the part of some of the divinity and atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ? to the man-exalting opinion which relies for its own salvation upon the piled-up fabric of its own righteousness, or which, through the flinty rocks of self-righteous morality, would tunnel out a passage to the eternal throne?

Are you strangers to the workings of the grand apostasy—darkening the sunlight of the Saviour's love, dislocating the perfection of the Saviour's work, hampering the course of the atonement with the frail entangled framework of human merit—restless in its endeavours

to regain its ascendancy, crafty and vigilant, and formidable as ever ?

Are you strangers to the heresy, which has made its appearance in the midst of a body once deeming itself the fairest offspring of the Reformation, and which would exclude thousands from covenanted mercies, because they own not priestly pretensions, and conform not to traditional rites ?

Are you strangers, in the other quarter of the horizon and of the sky, to dark and lowering portents that have come over with rationalistic and German infidelity ? Brethren, there is a duty, solemn and authoritative, resting upon the pious men, that they hold fast that which was "once delivered to the saints." Let the exhortations, too, on this matter be carefully pondered. "Be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." "Stand fast"—not loose, not easily shifted, having a firm foundation—"stand fast in the faith once delivered unto the saints." Be "rooted in the faith ;" be "grounded in the faith ;" "contend earnestly for the faith." Brethren, here is another invocation, and it is solemnly binding upon you. And while there are some around us that would rob Christ of his grace, and others that would rob Christ of his crown, and others that would steal both the one and the other, let it be ours to take our stand firm and unswerving by the altars of the truth ; let our determination go forth to the universe—"I determine to know nothing among men, save Jesus Christ and him crucified."

And then, thirdly, if you would be pious men as God estimates piety, you must cultivate cordial, brotherly love. In times like these, there is a solemn obligation resting upon all "who hold the head" to cultivate the spirit of unity with all "who hold the head." By unity we do not mean uniformity. There is none, there can be none in the free universe of God. You have it not in nature. You may go out into the waving woodland, when death is on the trees, and you may prune their riotous growth, and mould and shape and cut them into something like a decent, a decorous uniformity; but the returning spring, when it comes, will laugh at your aimless labour.

Wherever there is life, there will be found variety of engaging forms which attract and fascinate the eye. We do not mean uniformity, therefore—the harmony of voices, or the adjustment of actions, the drowsy repetition of one belief, or the harmonious intonation of one liturgy—but we mean "the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace," which we are to intensely labour to maintain and procure. Let the exhortations on this matter also be very solemnly pondered. "A new commandment"—the decalogue has been added to by this new commandment, which is, indeed, the substance and essence of all the rest—"A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." "Be kindly affectioned one to another, in brotherly love, in honour preferring one another." Nay, the Apostle does not hesitate to set it down as one of the surest evidences of Christian discipleship. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Compliance with these exhortations is

always imperative, especially imperative in seasons of national danger. Everything that is ominous, everything that is solemn, everything that is portentous around us, must be regarded as an earnest call to Christians to live together in love. This love is to be cherished everywhere—to be cherished toward all who are members of the universal Church. Here, of course, there should be no orphan's heart. Here, all should feel themselves members of a commonwealth. There should be a rejoicing with those that do rejoice, and a weeping with those that weep; and, as by electric fire, the wants and the wishes of the one should be communicated to, and acknowledged by, the whole—a love to be cherished not only in our own communion, but toward all who hold “the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.” Wherever Christ is acknowledged, his grace magnified, his crown vindicated, his law made honourable—wherever the service of Christ is the aim, and the glory of Christ is the purpose—there the Church should know as Christian, and should hail as brethren. This duty is one that has been scandalously neglected in the times in which we live; and that neglect has darkened the aspect and augmented the perils of the times. Brethren, we must all amend if we would not betray. And when the Church of Christ shall combine—in heart as in spirit one—then shall the great building of the universe progress. God shall smile upon the workmen; “the glory of the latter house shall exceed the glory of the former;” and the whole “building fitly framed together shall grow up unto a holy temple in the Lord.”

Then, fourthly, if we would be pious men as God estimates piety, we must be zealous in endeavour for the spread of the Gospel, and for the conversion of the world. The errors and the crimes of which we have spoken render this essential. We have but to bring our minds to the contemplation of guilt so heinous, so offensive, that it rises up in the presence of the Holy One, and calls for vengeance as he is seated upon his throne; then, we have but to remember the consequences of that guilt, everywhere producing misery, everywhere drying up the sources of spiritual affluence, everywhere exposing to the unending perditions of hell. Now, brethren, nothing—and I would speak as one member of the army summoning others to the battle-field—nothing will avail but the combined, and devoted, and persevering exertions of the members of the Church below. How else shall we attempt to grapple with the depravity around us? Parliamentary enactments, what can they do? Threats to affright, or bribes to seduce, what can they do? Patronage in all its prestige and all its power, all that can be possibly brought out of State treasury or of State influence, what are they? Utterly unavailing, without the power and Spirit of God. No; there must be a band of faithful men, who are thus renovated and redeemed, going forth in the name of the Lord. They must sustain the ministry in existing pastorates, and spread it wherever it has not been established. They must support institutions for the education of the entire man—institutions based upon the Word of God. They must become themselves preachers of “the truth as it is in Jesus;” by prayer, by influence, by example, by

effort, they must display all the grace which has redeemed them ; and especially, they must all in earnest, repeated, importunate supplications besiege the throne of grace in prayer. This is another summons—the last I shall give you on this matter to-night—and you are now to answer it with intense energy, with intense zeal. Coldness here is irrational. Ardour here is reason. Indifference here is foolishness. Earnestness, or, if you will, enthusiasm here is the highest and sublimest wisdom.

If you would be pious men, therefore, as God estimates piety, you are to come out from the world and to be separated from it ; you are to hold fast the doctrines you have received ; you are to cultivate to each other the tenderest brotherly love ; and you are to be energetic in heart for the conversion of the world.

II. I come now, secondly and briefly, to notice the effects which we are warranted in expecting such conduct as this to ensure. This is the doctrine of the text—that Sodom would have been spared if the ten righteous men had been there. Pious men are presented to us, therefore, as the safety of the nation in which they live. This is very beautifully presented in several other parts of Scripture. You have it, for instance, in the prophecy of Isaiah lxxv. 8, 9 : “ Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not ; for a blessing is in it ; so will I do for my servants’ sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor

of my mountains; and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there." Then, again, in the prophecy of Malachi iii. 10, 11 : " Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts."

We see here the development of the general principle for which we contend, that God preserves nations for the sake of pious men. The annals of the past show how very frequently he has put to naught statesmanship, fleets, and armies, and has rendered honour to truth, meekness, and righteousness. This I do solemnly believe to be the case in our own land in this crisis of its affairs; and I am bold to affirm my conviction, that the destinies of England and of the British Empire are at this moment in the hands of its pious men. If they be faithful to their high trust and to the vocation to which they are eminently and signally called, nothing can harm us; no weapon that is formed against us shall ever be able to prosper. I think this might be made out from the history of the past, both as to temporal and spiritual matters. I appeal to you, whether it is not manifest that the temporal interests of a nation are bound up in its piety? Let pious men prevail in a land, let the population become imbued with the spirit and with the

leaven of evangelical godliness—what is the consequence? Order is at once preserved. As their holiness spreads, as their unworldly yet earnest example manifests itself and begins to be felt, sounder views prevail. The moral is felt to exert a supremacy over the secular; the political agitator, the infidel demagogue, the philosophical theorist, are scouted as physicians of no value; and men everywhere learn to submit to the restraints and the well-regulated government of law.

Let pious men prevail, and they will keep up the freedom of a land. I do not mean that crouching emasculation on the one hand, nor that ribald licentiousness on the other hand, which have both been dignified by the name by extreme political parties; but I mean well-ordered and rational liberty—liberty which respects the rights of other people at the same time that it asserts and vindicates its own—liberty which with one hand renders to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and with the other hand renders to God the things that are God's—liberty which honours men as men, just because the Divine command tells it to "honour all men," and because, all the world over, there is nothing so royal as a man. That liberty will be preserved wherever pious men are found, and wherever the example of these pious men begins to spread itself among the people.

And, then, pious men will preserve the prosperity of a land. There is a false prosperity which must be abandoned; there is a false honour which must be speedily forsworn; but that prosperity, which is substantial and abiding, will remain under the influences of piety. Art will minister then not to luxury, but to

truth ; science will minister then not to infidelity, but to truth ; commerce will minister then not to selfishness, but to benevolence. Then other realms shall render to us their unbought and unpurchaseable homage ; and the sons of our country, in their not unholy pride, may wave their banner to the wind, with the motto on it—

“ He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves besides.”

Yes, brethren, it is Britain's altar and not Britain's throne, Britain's Bible and not Britain's statute book, that is the great and deep and strong source of her national prosperity and renown. Do away with this ; suffer that fidelity, with which, in some humble measure, we have borne witness for God, to be relaxed ; let our Sabbaths be sinned away at the bidding of unholy or mistaken mobs ; let us enter into adulterous and unworthy alliance with the man of sin ; let us be traitors to the trust with which God has invested us—to take care of the ark of the Lord—and the crown will lose its lustre, the peerage its nobility, and the senate its command ; all the phases of social rank and order will be disjointed and disorganized ; a lava tide of desolation will overwhelm all that is consecrated and noble, and angels may sing the dirge over a once great, but now hopelessly fallen people : “ The glory is departed from Israel, because the ark of God is taken.” Keep fast by that ark, hold it ; hold your attachment to it as the strongest element of being, and there shall be no bounds to the sacred magnificence of our nation ; but the fires of the last day, when they consume all

that is perishable and drossy, may see us with the light of the Divine presence gleaming harmlessly around our brow, and in our hand the open law for all the nations of mankind.

Those are temporal benefits. And, then, let there be pious men in the land, and spiritual benefits will also be secured. There will, for instance, be the defeat of erroneous opinions. Truth, when the Spirit inspires it not—abstract truth—is weak and powerless. Truth, with the Spirit, is mighty, and will prevail. There can be no fear as to the result. The world has never been left, and will never be left, without the active Spirit of God. Falsehood breaks out impetuously, just like one of those torrents that leap and rattle over the summit of the mountain after the thunderstorm, overwhelming in the first outbreak, but dying away into insignificance and silence by and by; truth is like the spring that rises up imperceptibly and gently, and flows on, unostentatious and noiseless, until at last navies are wafted on its bosom, and it pours its full volume of triumphant waters into the rejoicing sea. So it will be with truth; wealth cannot bribe it, talent cannot dazzle it, sophistry cannot overreach it, authority cannot please it—they all, like Felix, tremble in its majestic presence. Let pious men increase, and each of them will become a centre of holiness; apostates will be brought back to the Church; poor backsliders will be reclaimed into new-found liberty and new-created privilege; and there will be a cry like that on the summit of Carmel after the controversy was over, and had issued in the discomfiture of Baal—"The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God."

And then, better than all that, salvation of souls will be secured. The conversion of a soul is an infinitely greater triumph than the eradication of a false opinion. A false opinion may be crushed, and the man that holds it may be in imminent spiritual peril. Convert the man's soul, and his opinions will come right by and by. Oh, if, as you go from this place to-night, you were to behold the crowds of tempters to evil that will cross your path as you travel homeward—if you think of their activity, of their earnestness in leading others astray, and in making them sevenfold more the children of hell than they are themselves—and if you think of the apathy of the faithful, of the scantiness of effort, of the failure of faith, of the depression of endeavour, of the laxity of attachment on the part of believers in Jesus—surely there is enough to make you abashed and confounded. Brethren, I should like, if I could, to bring before you one solitary soul—to fasten your attention upon that soul, to transfix it as with a lightning glance before you, so that you might trace it in its downward path; see it as habit crusts it over, and selfishness rejoices over it, and the foul fiend gloats upon it in mockery, and disease, prematurely induced, comes upon it, and death waits for his prey, and hell is moved from beneath to meet it at its coming; and that you should follow it down into those dark and dread abodes, which man's pencil painteth not, and which man's imagination, thank God, cannot conceive. Oh, draw the curtain over that! we cannot bear the sight! But as you think of the real spiritual peril, in which not one, not a family—oh, if there

were but a family, all London would be awake for its deliverance!—but there is a world in danger—not one, not a family, not an island, not a continent, but a world: if I could only fasten that upon your consciences to-night, each one of you would surely go away with tearful eye and glad heart—glad that you were able to do anything for God—and would not rest without saying, “For Zion’s sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as the lamp that burneth.”

Just one parting word. If you would do all this, you must be pious yourselves; but do not be among the number of those who busy themselves in the externalisms of godliness, and are in some measure active in connection with the Church of God, but are out of Christ, aliens themselves from the commonwealth of Israel. If you are not personally pious, you will be accomplices in drawing down the thunderbolt—and chargeable to that extent with your country’s ruin, and the ruin of souls. Come to Christ now; let all your past iniquity be forgotten and forgiven, as you bow before him in humiliation and in tears; he will not refuse you; he will not cast you out. Then enter upon a life of piety in spite of all that scoffers say. Ah! religion is not so mean a thing as infidels represent it to be! They curl the lip of scorn at us, and we can bear that; they flash the eye of hate at us, and we can bear that, as long as God looks upon us with complacency. He has promised to crown us as conquerors in heaven, for which, by our spiritual conflicts and victories, we shall have come prepared.

Oh, it is no mean thing. The saint, the righteous man, the pious believer in Jesus, is a patriot as well as a saint. The worldling may sneer and scorn, but we have a noble revenge, for it is pious men that have kept the conflagrating elements away from this long doomed world up to the present moment of its history; and if the ten righteous had not been in this enormous Sodom, long ere now would the firebrand of destruction have struck it, that it might be consumed in its deserved ruin. Thank God, there is hope for the world yet.

When the prophet in depression and in sorrow was saying, "I, even I, only am left, the prophet of the Lord," God pointed him to seven thousand that had never bowed the knee to Baal; and there are faithful ones in the secret places of the world yet—palm-tree Christians growing up in the unexpected places, amid sandy soil and with no companionship—who are flourishing in godly vigour and earnest in persevering prayer. There is hope for the world yet. Oh, for the increase of these pious men! Be ye of the number of this unostentatious but valiant host. Do you pant for fame? You can find it here. Young men, there are some of you in the presence of God that have ambition high bounding in your hearts, who feel the elasticity of youth within you; who feel that the flight of your soaring spirit is not the flight of the flagging or the breathless; that there is something still within you that pants for a distinction other than you have yet attained—Oh, come to Christ, enlist yourselves in his service, be soldiers of the cross, fight moral battles, and yours shall be the victory. To you the Church is

looking; your fathers, worn out with labour, exhausted with the vicissitudes and the victories of years, are passing rapidly away, and they are wondering where their successors are. They have gone from us; just when we were expecting for them higher fields and wider triumphs, the fiery chariot came and they were not, and nothing was left for us but to cry as we followed the track of the cavalcade, in our hopelessness, almost in our agony—"My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Oh, thank God, they have flung their mantles down, and it is for you to catch them, to robe yourselves to-day in the garments of the holy departed, and like them, to do and die.

XLIII.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

“Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not ; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully ; but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”—2 Cor. iv. 1, 2.

THIS is the Apostle’s recorded judgment as to the mission of the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, and the duties of which he discharged with such singular fidelity and zeal. In the preceding chapter he magnifies its superiority, alike of glory and of substantial usefulness, over the dispensation of the law ; and then, in a few weighty words, separates himself entirely from all false teachers, and establishes himself upon the ground of holy character and of exalted office, as Heaven’s high remembrancer among the nations—the true witness for God amid a dark and alien world. He takes care, at the very onset, to assure those to whom he speaks, that he is of the same nature, and, originally, of the same sinfulness as themselves —“Therefore, seeing we have received this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.” “We are not (as if he had said) a distinct order of beings ; there is no natural superiority of character which might make the minister proud, or which might

make the hearer distant, and callous, and unsympathizing. We once were sinners, we have the memory of bondage ; but we have received mercy, and are anxious to tell of the tidings that have redeemed us and others ; as we have received mercy, we faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, the secret immoralities of Pagan priests ; not walking in craftiness—not retaining our hold upon the consciences of men by deceitfulness and unrighteousness, and by juggling, lying wonders ; not handling the Word of God deceitfully—not preaching an adulterated truth as a flexible Gospel ; not blind to the prejudices, or silent as to the vices, of those who hear us ; but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

All that is affirmed by the Apostle of the ministry in olden time, may be affirmed of the ministry of reconciliation now. That ministry, wickedly maligned on the one hand, imperfectly fulfilled on the other hand, has yet its mission to the world. The unrepealed command still stands upon the statute book : "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." And it is a prayer often earnestly and passionately uttered by those on whom the obligations have fallen ; that, repudiating artifice and idleness, they may, by manifestation of the truth, commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. I purpose, God helping me, briefly to notice from these words to-night—

I. The business of the ministry.

II. The instrumentality which it employs.

III. The thought that hallows it.

I. The ministry—this is my first position—has a business with the world. Some people think it has not. It is the divinely appointed agency for the communication of God's will to man. As a Divine institution, it advances its claims in the beginning, and in no solitary instance have they been relinquished since. These divinely authorized enactments are still in force. The Bible says: "When he (Christ) ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men; And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying the body of Christ." There might be something special, perhaps, in this original commission, but the principle of its Divine origin is evidently presented as the principle of the ministry itself; for St. Paul, who was not then called, who speaks of himself afterward as one born out of due time, earnestly and anxiously vindicates the heavenly origin of his apostleship: "But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

This it is which is the elevation of the Christian ministry, which exalts it far above human resources and human authority. It travels on in its own majestic strength—Heaven-inspired and Heaven-sustained. Moreover, the same passage which tells us of the institution of the Christian ministry, announces its perpetuity, and tells us of the period when it shall be no longer needed—"Till we all come into the unity

of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

This period, thus divinely appointed for the cessation of the ministry, has obviously not yet arrived. The world sees but little yet of millennial glory; there is yet an alienated heart in its debased and rebel tribes; there is nothing in the pursuits which it follows, nothing in the natural impulses which move it, to incite to holy aim, or to induce spiritual living. It has no self-suggestive memory of God; it has passions as blind and powerful, and a will as perverse as ever. Death is in the midst of it; and though the corpse may be sometimes embalmed with spices, or tricked out with flowers, or carried 'neath obsequious plumes to burial, the chill is at its heart, the breath of the plague is in the tainted air, and there is yet strong and solemn need for the anointed witness who may stand between the dead and the living, that the plague may be stayed.

There are some, I know, who tell us that the mission of the pulpit is fulfilled; and they acknowledge that, in the earlier ages, and in the times of comparative darkness, when men spelled out the truth in syllables, it did a noble work. But the world has outgrown it, they tell us; men need neither its light nor its warning; the all-powerful press shall direct them; the educational institute shall assist them in their upward progress; they shall move onward and upward, under the guidance of the common mind. And while this is the cry of infidelity and indifferentism, there are some among ourselves who have partially

yielded to the clamour. They have deplored (as who must not?) the apparent ineffectiveness of existing agencies, the feebleness of the efforts for evangelical aggression; and, in their eagerness to conciliate prejudice and disarm opposition, they have compromised somewhat the high tone of Christian teaching, and have studiously avoided the very terminology of the Bible—so that the great truths of God's will and man's duty, of Christ's atonement and the sinner's pardon, of the Spirit's work and the believer's growth—those old gospels, whose sound is always music, and whose sight is always joy—are hardly to be recognized, as they are hidden beneath profound thought, or veiled within affected phrase.

But the Divine institution of the ministry is not to be thus superseded. It has to do with eternity, and the matters of eternity are paramount. It deals, and would grapple with, the inner man. It has to do with the deepest emotions of the nature—with those far higher instincts of eternal truths which underlie all systems, from which a man can never utterly divorce himself, and which God himself has graven on the soul. So far as they walk in harmony with its high purpose, it will hail the helping of all other teaching; but God hath set it on the monarchy, and it dare not abdicate its throne.

You sometimes complain of the worldliness and the infidelity of the pulpit. It is but one phase of the method in which the human heart discovers its rooted and apparently unconquerable enmity to God; and it is one of the worst symptoms of the disease which the ministry has been calculated and

instituted to remove. The teaching of the political agitator, of the philanthropic idealist, of the benevolent instructor, why are they so popular? The teaching of the religious minister, why is it so repulsive to the world? Mainly from this fact, that the one reprove, and the other exalt our nature; the one ignore, and the other insist upon the doctrine of the fall. You will find all the schemes for the uplifting of man—apart from all teaching that is not grounded on the Bible—to consist in the exaltation of his nature as it is, in elevated ideas of its perfect ability, in assertions that it needs neither revelation nor heavenly influence to guide it into the way of truth.

Thus the Gospel is presented only as one among many systems, which all men may accept or reject at pleasure. Its restraints are deemed impertinences, its reproofs unnatural bondage; the talk in such teaching is pregnant of rights, seldom of duties. They are complimented on their manliness, who ought to be humbled for their sin; and by insidious panderings to their pride, they are exhorted to atheism, self-reliance, or habitual disregard of God. Both kinds of teaching—the worldly and the religious—alike aim at the uplifting of the nature; but then they look at it from different standpoints, and of course they apply to it different treatment. One is an endeavour to exalt the nature without God; the other would take hold on his strength, and work to the praise of his glory. The one regards humanity as it once was, before sin had warped it, able to tower triumphant in its own unaided strength; the other sees it decrepit or ailing—the whole head sick, and the whole heart faint—and yet, by the

balm of Gilead, to be restored to pristine vigour; the one deems that no confusion has come upon its language, nor shame upon its many builders, and would pile up its Babel towers until they smite the skies; the other sees the towers in ruins—splintered shaft and crumbling arch bearing witness that they were once beautiful exceedingly—and that, by the grace and skill of the heavenly architect, they may grow up again into a holy temple in the Lord.

It is absolutely necessary, in this age of manifold activities, and of spiritual pride, that there should be this ever-speaking witness of man's feebleness and of God's strength; and, however much the opposition against the ministry may tell—and it does tell, and it ought to tell—against the vapid and frivolous, against the idle and the insincere, it is a powerful proof for the institution of the ministry itself—just as the blast that scatters the acorns, roots the oak more firmly in the soil. So long as men are born, and die; so long as the recording angel registers human guilt; so long as responsibility and retribution are unheeded truths; so long as there is one solitary sinner tainted by the black original; so long will the ministry have a business with the world; and it is the earnest prayer of those who have undertaken it, that they may, in some humble measure—with all fidelity, and with dauntless courage, with genial sympathy, and with pure affection—be witnesses for God, like the glorious angel whom the Evangelist saw with the sheen of heaven on his wings, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto every nation, and people, and tongue.

II. I observe, secondly, that this business of the ministry is mainly with the consciences of men. Every man has a conscience, that is, a natural sense of the difference between good and evil—a principle, which does not concern itself so much with the true and the false in human ethics, or with the gainful and damaging in human fortunes, as with the right and wrong in human conduct. Call it what you will, analyze it as you may—a faculty, an emotion, a law—it is the most important principle in our nature, because by it we are brought into sensible connection with a sensible recognition of the moral government of God. It has been defined sometimes as a tribunal within a man, for his own daily and impartial trial; and in its various aspects it answers, and answers right well, to all parts of the judicial tribunal. It is the bar at which the sinner pleads; it proffers the accusation of transgression, it records the crime, it bears witness to guilt or innocence, and as a judge, it acquits or condemns; thus taking cognizance of moral actions, it is the sense which relates us to the other world; and by it, God, retribution, eternity, are made abiding realities to the soul. As by the physical senses we are brought into communion with the physical world, and the blue heavens overhead and the green earth round are recognised in their relations to ourselves—so, by this moral sense of consciousness, we see ourselves in the light of immortal and responsible creatures, and gain ideas of duty and of God.

How mighty is the influence which this power has wielded, and yet continues to wield, in the world! There are many that have tried to be rid of it; but

there is a manhood at its heart which murder cannot kill. There are many that have rebelled against its authority; but they have acknowledged its might notwithstanding, and it has rendered them disturbed and uneasy in their sin. There are multitudes more who have fretted against its wholesome warnings; and often when, because it has warned them of danger, or threatened them with penalty, they have tried to stifle and intimidate it, it has risen up suddenly into braver resurrection, and pealed forth its remonstrances in bolder port and louder tone. But for these restraints, many of the world's reputable ones would have become criminal; but for these restraints, many of the world's criminals would have been more audaciously bad. It has spoken, and the felon, fleeing when no man pursued him, has been chased by a falling leaf. It has spoken, and the burglar has paled behind his mask, startled at his own footfall. It has spoken, and the coward assassin has been arrested in his purpose, and he has paused irresolute ere he struck the blow. Its vindictive and severe upbraidings, after the sin has been committed, have often lashed the sinner into agony, and secured an interval of comparative morality, by preventing the repetition of the sin for a season. It has been the one witness for God amid the traitor faculties—single but undismayed, solitary but true. When the understanding, and the memory, and the will, and the affections, had all consented to the enticements of evil, the conscience has stood firm, and a man could never sin with comfort until he had drugged it into desperate repose. It has been the one dissentient power among the

faculties—like a moody guest among a company of frantic revellers, whom they could neither conciliate nor expel. When God's judgments have been abroad in the earth, and men would fain resolve them into ordinary occurrences or natural phenomena, conscience has refused to be satisfied with such delusive interpretation; and, with a prophet's inspiration, has itself deciphered the handwriting as it blazed upon the wall. It has forced a criminal oftentimes to deliver himself up to justice, preferring the public shame of the trial and the gallows-tree to the deeper hell of a conscience aroused and angry. Yes, and it has constrained from the dying sinner a testimony to the God he has insulted; given when the shadows of corruption were all darkening upon the branded brow.

Oh, that must be a mighty power which has wrought, and which is working thus—and it has wrought, and it is working in *you*. And as such we acknowledge it. We can despise no man that has a conscience, although with meanness and sin he may largely overlay it. We recognise the majestic and insulted guest, and are silent and respectful, as in the presence of a fallen king. We see a family likeness, although intemperance has blotted the features and dimmed the sparkle of the eye—"There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding."

Now, it is with this faculty in man that the minister has mainly to do. His work, his business, his sole business, is to bring out the world's conscience in answer to the truths of Divine revelation, recognising in it something that can respond to its own duty—the ministering witness that will con-

stantly appeal to the answering witness within. Regarding all other faculties—however separately noticeable—as avenues only to the conscience, he will aim constantly at the ears of the inner man. To come short of this is to come short of duty; to fail in this, is to fail in the work which our Master has given us to do. We should form but a very unworthy estimate of our own high calling, if we were to aim at the subjugation of any subordinate faculty, and, that accomplished, sit down as if our work was done.

The minister may appeal to the intellect; of course he may. All thanks to him, if he clears away difficulties from the path of the bewildered. All thanks to him, if he presents truth in its symmetry of system, and in all the grand and rounded harmony of its beautiful design. But he must press through the outworks to the citadel—through the intellect to the conscience—that the understanding, no longer darkened, may apprehend the truth; and that the apprehended truth may make the conscience free.

Imagination may be reached and charmed by the truth, which is itself beauty, but only that it may hold the mirror up to conscience, and see its own portrait there—photographed directly from on high, and which, with such marvellous fidelity, gives all the scars upon the countenance, and every spot and wrinkle on the brow.

The passions may be roused by the truth, which is its highest power—not that people may swoon away under terrific apprehensions of wrath, or even that people may escape hell and enter heaven, but that

conscience may resolve on a holy life—that there may result a transformed and spiritual character—and that, through impending fear of perdition and the promised water of life, a man may issue into the wealthy place of confidence in God, and of assimilation to his image.

It is not the intellect then, but the conscience; not the imagination, but the conscience; not the passions, but the conscience—to which the minister is to commend himself in the sight of God. If he speak to the intellect, the philosopher can rival him; if he speak to the imagination, the poet soars above him; if he speak to the passions, the political demagogue can do better. But in his power over the conscience, he has a power that no man shares—an autocrat undisputed—a czar of many lands—and he can wield the sceptre over the master faculty of man. But very solemn is the responsibility, which thus rests upon the religious teacher to have the master faculty of man within his grasp; to witness of truths that are unpopular, and that are repulsive; to reprove of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; to do this with his own heart frail and erring, and with a moral conflict battling in his own spirit the while. “Who is sufficient for these things?” breaks often from the minister’s heart in its seasons of depression and unrest.

But there is a comfort—a comfort broad and strong—and I have that comfort to-night, that while, pained by man’s unworthiness, pained by the trifling of multitudes over whom ministers meet and yearn, pained by the short-sighted and self-complacent indifference both

of the church and of the world, pained by the thousand difficulties which Satan always puts in the way of the reception of the truth as it is in Jesus—I say, there is a comfort of which I cannot be deprived, a comfort broad and strong—that all the while there is a mysterious something at work in you, in all of you, making the faithful appeal, pointing the solemn warning, striking the alarum in the sinner’s soul. There ! listen to that ! that belongs to thee ; that heart so callous and ungrateful, it is thine ; that sin that the minister reproves, thou hast committed it ; that doom so full of agony and horror, thou art speeding to it. How wilt thou escape the condemnation of hell ? Oh, many a time and oft, when the minister that has gone sheafless to his home, and in tears has uttered the complaint, “ Who hath believed our report ? ” the minister’s prayer has, by God’s grace, been heard, and the harvest-man has gathered sheaves into his garner. And often, when to the eye of human minister there has been no ripple on the waves—deep in the depths of the soul have swelled the billows of the troubled sea, and in keenest acknowledgment of the truth he has endeavoured to impress, men’s consciences have borne him witness—“ their thoughts meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.”

I observe again, that the great instrumentality which the ministry is empowered to use is the truth. “ By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” You will have no difficulty in understanding what the apostle here means by truth, because he calls it the word of God, and in the verse immediately succeeding,

“our Gospel.” “If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” To the mind of the Apostle, the reception of God in Christ, the life, the teaching, the wondrous death of Jesus, was the truth, in contradiction, or rather in contradistinction to truth undefined—the truth alone adapted to the supply of every need, and for the rescue from every peril. The Apostle was no ordinary man. Well read in the literature of the times, observant of the tendencies and the inclinations of men, he would be ready to acknowledge truth everywhere; he knew that there had been truth in the world before. He would see it in Pagan systems, gleaming faintly through incumbent darkness. Fragments of it had fallen from philosophers in former times, and had been treasured up as wisdom. It had a sort of healthy circulation through household impulses, and the ordinary concerns of man. But it was all truth for the intellect, truth for social life, truth for the manward—not the Godward relations of the soul. The truth which told of God, which hallowed all morality by the sanctions of the Divine law, which provided for the necessities of the entire man, lay dimly in uncertain traditions. Conscience was a slave; if it essayed to speak, it was overborne by clamour, or hushed by interest into silence. The higher rose the culture, the deeper sank the character; and the whole world seemed like one vast valley, fertile and gay with flowers, but no motion in the dim, dead air; not any song of bird, or sound of rill; the darkness of the inner sepulchre was not so deadly still, until there came down a breath from heaven bringing life upon its wings, and bringing that life into the uncon-

scious heaps of slain. Thus, when Christ came with his Gospel of purity and freedom, all other truth seemed to borrow from it a clearer light and a richer adaptation; the ordinary instincts of right and wrong were sharpened into a keener discernment, and invested with a more spiritual sensibility. The Gospel founded a grander morality; the Gospel established a more chivalrous honour; the Gospel shed out a more genial benevolence. All the old systems had looked at man as a half man only, on one side of his nature—that part of it that lay down to the earth. The Gospel took the whole round of his faculties, both as lying toward earth, and as rising toward heaven.

Love to man—the broad, ordinary, commonplace philanthropy of every day, the philanthropy that wings the feet of the good Samaritan, and that sends forth almsgivers upon their errands of mercy—love to man was not known in its fulness till the Gospel came. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour,” was the command of old; but then the Jews first contracted the neighbourhood, and then they contracted the affection. The Jew’s neighbour was not the Samaritan, but one within his own exclusive pale and sphere. But when love to God came—like a queenly mother leading out her daughter by the hand—then men wondered at the rare and radiant beauty that had escaped their notice so long. And when they loved God first, then it was for that master-love the streams of love to man flowed forth in ceaseless and in generous profusion. And the Gospel is just the same now; it is the great inspiration of ordinary kindnesses, and of the every day and rippling happiness of life. It is the truth for man, the

truth for man's every exigency; and for his every peril, blessing the body and saving the soul. By the truth then, which we are to commend to every man's conscience, we understand the truth as it is in Jesus; the truth which convinces of sin, and humbles under the sense of it; the truth which reveals full atonement, and flashes pardon from it, and which leads the pardoned spirit upward to holiness and heaven.

Now, we are to bring that conscience and that truth into connection with each other; and it is the great business for which we are gathered to-night. In order that there may be the bringing of the one into connection with the other, there must be variety in the truth—suited to the various states in which the consciences of men may be found.

Now, for the sake of argument, we may take it that there are three states in which nearly the whole of the consciences of humanity are ranged—those whose consciences are slumbering, torpid, inert, lifeless; those whose consciences are quick, apprehensive, and armed; those whose consciences have passed through these two former stages, and are now peaceful, happy, and at rest. To each of these varieties of conscience we are to commend the truth in the sight of God.

In the first place, I say, there are some consciences that have no apprehension of God, no spiritual sensibility at all. It is a very sad thought that this has been, and continues to be, the condition of the vast majority of mankind. Think of the whole countries of Paganism, where the true God is lost from knowledge—with its monstrous idols, fertile of cruelty, and its characters exemplifying every form of evil. You

may look through universal history, you can see the track of passion in the light of the flames which it has kindled; you can see the works of imagination throned in bodiless thought, or sculptured in breathing marble; you can see the many inventions of intellect on every hand; but for conscience, conscience occupying its rightful seat, and exerting its legitimate authority, you look almost in vain.

But I need not stop to generalize. I need not tell you of the cases of the infant, or the idiot, in which the conscience sleeps like a winged insect in chrysalis. Alas! there are nearer and deadlier examples at hand. In Christian England, in the Gospel noontide, amid crowds of religious ordinances, with the truths of the Gospel "familiar in our mouths as household words," there are multitudes of whom it may be said—"God is not in all their thoughts;" to whom conscience is a dull and drowsy monitor, and who live on from day to day in disregard of plainest duties, and in habitually hardening sin. Are there not some here, some of you it may be, who scoff at the place of worship, who imagine that yours are not the feet that are to tread the courts of the Lord's house?—some of you, it may be, who go there, but who go there to little purpose, decorous and seemly enough in external worship, rarely missed from your accustomed seat in the sanctuary—but you have trifled with conscience so long, that it rarely troubles you; and when it does, you pooh-pooh it as the incoherencies of a drunkard, or the ravings of some frantic madman. Brethren, I do feel it a solemn duty to manifest God's arousing truth to you. I appeal to the moral sense within you. You are attentive to the

truth ; the Word is suffered to play around your understanding. I want to go deeper ; let me grapple with your conscience, my brethren. I appeal to the moral sense within you ; I accuse you fearlessly of heinous and flagrant transgression, because you have not humbled yourself before heaven, and because the God, in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, you have not glorified. I charge you with living to yourselves ; or, going about to establish your own righteousness, you have not submitted yourselves unto the righteousness of God. I arraign you as being guilty of base ingratitude, inasmuch as when Christ was offered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring you to God, you refused ; and you have trodden under foot the blood of the Covenant, and accounted it an unholy thing. I accuse some of you, moreover, of trying to secure impunity by your vile treatment of God's inward witness. You have deposed conscience from its throne ; you have tried to bribe it to be a participator with you in your crimes ; you have overborne it by interest of business, of commerce, of pleasure ; you have limited its scrutiny to the external actions, and not allowed it to sit in judgment over the thoughts and intentions of the inner man. When it has startled you with an accusation, you have lulled it to sleep, and drugged it into desperate repose ; and you have done all this—you know you have—on purpose that you might the more easily and more comfortably sin.

Brethren, I am not your enemy, because I have told you the truth. That very conscience which you have insulted, which you have stoned with many stones—bruised and bleeding under your cruel usage

—bears me witness that it is the truth which I now minister before you. I warn you of your danger; but I would not fear to shake you roughly, if I could only bring you to the knowledge of yourselves. It is a sad and a disastrous thought, that there are some consciences here so fatally asleep, that they may never be aroused, except by the peal of the judgment trumpet, or by the flashing of the penal fire.

There are some of you, whose consciences are in another state. They are not absolutely dead. The law, in some form of administration, has come to you, and it has roused you from your slumbers. You see the incongruity between yourselves and the commandment. There is a thorn rankling within you. You mourn and go softly, and are disquieted in bitterness of soul. History is one uniform narrative of the struggles of men to escape from the terrors of a guilty conscience. No austerities have been too severe, no penances too costly, no pilgrimages too arduous, no rites too cruel, if only the trouble of conscience might be appeased. There are some of you, perhaps, that have been saying: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" You would deny it, if any one were to charge you with having a conscience tender or aroused; but the brow of unusual thoughtfulness—the tear trickling down the cheek in silence—the eyes that have been unused to weep—the sigh, unbidden, heaving—these are signs of the struggle that has been going on within. Your self-control has triumphed, though. You called it up; you wanted to show that you were manly; and your self-control has triumphed. You locked sorrow fast

in your own bosom, and even in the sight of those who would fain have seen you moved, that they might have led you to Christ. You have been as a heathen man and as a publican. You have seemed hard and impenetrable. Oh, but there has been a terrible war in your soul. Your conscience has been at work—it is at work now—and I have a power over you from this fact, that I have an ally in your own bosom that is testifying to the truth of the things I speak before you. You may fret against that power, you may rebel against that power, but you cannot rob me of it; you cannot keep the barb out. All your endeavours to extract it widen and deepen the wound.

My brother, oh let me but manifest Christ's redeeming truth to thee! Christ has died. All thy wants may be supplied from his wondrous death. Is thy heart callous and ungrateful? He has exalted the law, and made it honourable. Hast thou dishonoured justice? He has satisfied its claims. Hast thou violated law? He has lifted up the majesty of its equity. Is there in thy spirit unrest and storm? Come to him. Thy conscience is like the Galilean lake. Oh, it shall know him, and there shall be a great calm! Doth the curse brood over thee, and calamity appal thy soul? Flee from the threatened danger to his outstretched arms; and as thou reposest on his bosom, hear his whispered comfort—"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." See, the clouds disappear, the tempests pass by, the storms rage no longer; lift up thy head, serene, peaceful, smiling, happy; let us hear thy expe-

rience—"In whom I have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

Some of you have gone a little farther, perhaps. You have passed through the drooping stage, and have passed through the alarmed stage, and you are settling down in the peaceful stage—happy in the sense of the Redeemer's love. Oh, you are in the fairest possible position for the true soul-growth, day by day! You rejoice in Christ Jesus now; you have a victory over the carnal mind now; all antagonistic powers are made subject now; conscience has resumed its authority, and is sensitive of the first approach of evil, and eager for the complete will of God. I rejoice to manifest God's disciplining, training, growing, comforting, nourishing truth to you; you are in the fairest possible position—I repeat it. Self is not the master principle now. You are not paralyzed by craven fear; you are freed from the evil forces that enchained the soul. There is a good and a fair land beyond—yours by chartered promise, and which you are well able to overcome. Rise to the dignity of your heritage. As you have been begotten of the Word, be sanctified by the Word, and let the Word make you free. Strengthened in the truth, the soul groweth day by day. Oh, what a victory awaits you! Day by day, more like God. Day by day, brighter visions of the throne. Day by day, increased power over sin; increased progress toward the heavenly; increased fellowship with the Divine; and then, when the tabernacle falls down beneath the death-blast, for the sensitive and immortal inhabitant there opens another scene—angelic

welcomes, the King in his beauty, and the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. By manifestation of the truth, "commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

"In the sight of God!" Ah, that is the thought that hallows it! All our endeavours for the enlightenment of our fellows are under the felt inspection of Almighty God. His eye marks the effort; his voice, "I know thy works," is constantly in-spoken to the soul. It is necessary that we should feel this, in order to fit us for our duty. If we do not feel this, we shall have no courage. Depend upon it, the heroism which the pulpit needs—which it never needed in this world's history half so much as it needs to-day—the heroism which the pulpit needs, which the ministry must have, will not be wrought in the soul, unless this thought is there. There is so much to enslave a man—the consciousness of his own unworthiness; the weakness of his best and holiest moments; the love of approbation, which forms a natural instinct, swelling often into a sore temptation; the reluctance to give offence, lest the ministry should be blamed; the haunting anxiety as to what men think of him and say of him—Oh, how often have these things checked the stern reproof and the faithful warning, and made the preacher the slave instead of the monarch of his congregation; and instead of the stern, strong, fearless utterances of the prophet, he may stammer forth his lisping words with the hesitancy of a blushing child. Depend upon it, this is no light matter. It requires no common boldness to stand single-handed before the pride of birth, and the pride of rank, and the pride of office, and the pride of

intellect, and the pride of money—to rebuke their transgressions, and to strip off their false confidence, and tear away their refuges of lies. But if a man has only burnt into his heart, that he is speaking in the sight of God—ah, he will do it! Yes, God-fear will banish man-fear. He will feel that for the time the pulpit is his empire, and the temple is his throne; and, like another Baptist, he will thunder out his denunciations against rich and poor together, with his honest eyes straight flashing into theirs—“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

“In the sight of God!” Give him that thought, and he will be tender as well as brave. He will look upon his congregation as immortal; he will see in each one before him (oh, the thought is overwhelming!) an offspring of the Divine, an heir of the everlasting; and in this aspect of it he will tremble before the majesty of man. He will be awestruck, as he thinks of trying to influence them for eternity. There will be no harshness in his tones, there will be no severity in his countenance. If the violated law must speak out its thunders, it will be through brimming eyes and faltering tongues. He will remember his own recent deliverance; like Joseph, he will scatter blessings round him with large and liberal hand; but there will be no ostentation, there will be no vanity, for he will remember that he is but the almoner of another’s bounty, and that his own soul has only just been brought out of prison. He will be like one shipwrecked mariner who has got upon the rock, and is stretching out a helping hand to another who yet struggles in the waters; he that is on the rock knows

that he has only a slippery footing, and that the yawning ocean is beneath him. Oh, let us realize that we are in the sight of God, and we shall have larger sympathies for man. We shall have more of the spirit of him who "went about doing good," and who was "the friend of publicans and sinners." There will be no fierce rebukes, no proud exclusivism, no pharisaical arrogance then. The sleeper will not be harshly chided; the remonstrance of affection will yearn over him, and the tear will gather in his eye as the invitation is given, or the regret is breathed—"Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." "Come, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"In the sight of God!" That will help us to persevere. We shall be constant, as well as brave and tender, if we realize continually that we are in the sight of God. Though difficulties multiply, this will prevent us from becoming weary and faint in our minds. We shall remember him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; and through perverseness and obduracy, whether men will hear, or whether men will forbear—we shall labour on for the cause of Christ, and for the good of souls. We shall not be satisfied with good report, with extensive popularity, with decorous congregations, with attention, —settled and serious—upon every countenance. We shall want souls. We shall press right away through to the great end of restoring the supremacy of conscience, and bringing a disordered world back again to its allegiance to God. This is our life-work, and we are doing it day by day—unfaithfully, imperfectly; but

we are doing it. Moral truth upon the mind of man is something like a flat stone in a churchyard through which there is a thoroughfare. Hundreds of pattering feet go over it day by day; familiarity with it has weakened the impression, and time has effaced the letter. The foot of each passer-by adds something to the work of decay; but God has sent us with a friendly chisel to bring it out again into sharp, clearest, distinctest outline before the spirits of men. That is our life-work; and we are labouring on amid the driving sleet and pelting rain—jostled now and then by the rude and heedless passenger, fitfully looked at by busy men who flit away to the farm and the merchandise; regarded with a sort of contemptuous admiration by those who admire our industry, while they pity our enthusiasm. Patient, earnest workers, we must labour on—and we intend to do so. God helping us, the ministry of reconciliation is to be proclaimed here, Sabbath after Sabbath, universally, unto those who will come, without money, and without price; and, verily, we shall have our reward. I cannot labour in vain. What, think you, would sustain me under the pressure of multiplied excitement, and multiplied sorrow, and multiplied labour, but the thought that I cannot labour in vain? The words I have spoken to-night are flung forward, and they have lodged in the conscience, and I cannot recall them; simple, well-known Bible truths, they have gone into your consciences, and I cannot recall them. But they shall come up some day. You and I may never meet again, until we stand at the judgment-seat of God; then they shall come up; *then*, and verily I shall have my

reward. I shall have it, when some fair-haired child stops to spell out the syllables upon that flat stone, and goes away with a new purpose in his heart—I shall have it, when some weather-beaten man, bronzed with the hues of climates, and the shades of years, takes the solemn warning, numbers his days, and applies his heart unto wisdom—I shall have it, in the welcome given to my ascending spirit by some whom I first taught, it may be unworthily, to swell the hosanna of praise, or to wrestle in all the litanies of prayer—I shall have it, in that smile that wraps up all heaven in itself, and in those tones of kindness which flood the soul with ineffable and everlasting music: “Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” I leave with you and with the Spirit the Word of His grace, praying that He who alone can accomplish it, may give it life and power.

XLIV.

CELESTIAL STRIFE.

‘ And I saw, and behold a white horse : and he that sat on him had a bow ; and a crown was given unto him : and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.”—REV. vi. 2.

HOW animating is the sound of war ! How easily can it awaken the ardours of the unrenewed and unsanctified heart of man ! There is no profession in which he can gain more renown and applause, than in the profession of arms. It is the birthplace of what men call glory. Custom has baptized it honourable ; it carries with it a pomp and a circumstance, of which other professions are destitute ; it has nerved the arm of the patriot, it has fired the genius of the painter, it has strung and swept the poet’s lyre ; nations have bowed before its shrine, and even religion has prostituted herself to bless and consecrate its banners. Yet it must not be forgotten that, for the most part, human conquerors are just murderers upon a grand scale—mighty butchers of humankind. Their victories are won amid extermination and havoc ; their track is traced in ruin ; there is human life upon their laurels ; and if they wish to acquire a name, they have got one—let them glory as they can in its possession—the voice of blood proclaims it from the ground ;

and it is vaunted from earth to heaven by the wailings of orphaned hearts, and by the deep execrations of despair.

The sacred writings, however, tell us of one Conqueror whose victories were peacefully achieved, whose battles were bloodlessly won; or, if his onward march was discoloured by blood, it was his own. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who is thus evidently set forth before us; he who "died the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." In the fulfilment of the various duties connected with the mediatorial office which he had undertaken, he is frequently represented as going to battle against his adversaries, as routing them by the word of his mouth, and returning in exultation and triumph. Instances of this you will easily and at once remember. Thus in the forty-fifth Psalm, which we read in your hearing to-night: "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things." Again, in the eleventh chapter of Luke: "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." And yet again, according to the mysterious apocalypses of the book of Revelation: "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them." It matters not how numerous or how powerful his enemies may be; alike over the powers of darkness with their legioned hosts

of foes ; alike over the corruptions of the human heart, with all its ramifications of depravity ; alike over the false systems into which the corruption has retreated, as into so many garrisoned and fortified towns, “ a crown is given unto him, and he goeth forth conquering and to conquer.”

It is not my intention this evening, and time would forbid it even if we had the desire, to enter into all the details of this interesting and absorbing strife. I should just like for a moment or two to concentrate your attention upon one phase of the conflict—the battle with the old serpent the devil, the great origin of evil, under whose generalship the others are mustered, and to whose commands they submittingly bow. Behold then the combat, beyond all others important—the combat between Christ and Satan for the human soul—and, as you trace the progress of the fight, remember with encouragement, and say, that “ he goeth forth conquering and to conquer.” It will be necessary, in order to have the whole matter before us, that we introduce the cause of strife, the battle, and the victory.

First, as to the cause of strife. You know that when the all-comprising benevolence of God found heaven too small for the completion of its vast designs, this earth arose in order and in beauty from his forming hands. After by his Spirit he had garnished the heavens, and scattered upon the fair face of nature the labour of his hand and the impress of his feet—as the fairest evidence of Divine workmanship, the last and most excellent of his works below—he made man in his own image, after his own likeness. The soul was the property of him by whom it was created,

who imparted to it its high and noble faculties, by whom, notwithstanding its defilement, it is still sustained, and from whom proceed the retributions which shall fix its doom for ever. Man was created in possession of that moral purity—that absolute freedom from sin—which constituted of itself assimilation to his Maker's image; and so long as he retained that image, so long was he the Divine property, and the Divine portion alone. But the moment he sinned—the moment of the perversion of his nature, of the estrangement of his faculties, of the alienation of his heart—he came under a different tenure, and became a vassal of a different lord.

Satan himself—once an inhabitant of the high realms of glory, but hurled from that glorious height for disobedience and pride—was mysteriously permitted to tempt our first parents in the garden, with the full knowledge on their part that—standing as they did in their representative and public character—if they fell, the consequences of that one transgression were entailed upon all their posterity. With the circumstances of the original temptation you are all, of course, familiar, and the issue of it you have in that one verse in the book of Genesis—"Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." This tells us of the contravention, the direct contravention of a known law—a law, which God as the Supreme Creator had a perfect right to institute; a law, which man, as a dependent creature, was under binding obligations to obey. It was instituted avowedly as a test of

obedience; and this is all that we would condescend to answer to the laboured sarcasms of foolish infidelity. Any wayfaring man, though a fool, can curl his lip and declaim against the insignificance of the act from which such mighty issues sprang; but they forget that the moment the temptation was yielded to, there was in human nature a very incarnation of the devil. Under that demoniacal possession, the man was prepared for any infraction, from the eating of the forbidden fruit to the subversion of an almighty throne; and he, who under such circumstances would violate a known command, however trifling, would not—if the circumstances had been equal—have shrunk from the endeavour to scale the battlements of heaven, and pluck the crown from the very brow of the Eternal. Hence it was—by yielding to the suggestions of the tempter, and to his infamous temptation—that the portals of the palace were flung wide open for the strong man armed to enter; and hither, alas! he came with all his sad and fearful train, enthroning himself upon the heart, setting up his image, as Bunyan hath it, in the market-place of the town of Mansoul; fortifying every avenue, filling every chamber, corrupting every faculty, enervating every inhabitant, and announcing every moment the symbols of his own resolve to grasp and hold it for ever. Here, then, is in brief the cause of this celestial strife. The soul, a colony of heaven, had been taken—usurped possession of—by the powers of hell; and the effort to restore it to allegiance was the main cause of this celestial war.

Still further to impress you with the weighty causes of the strife, let us remind you for a moment of the

character of the government thus acquired. The dominion which Satan exercises over the human soul is despotic in its character. He is not a mere monarch, he is an autocrat; he admits no compromise, he brooks no rival, he pours his uncleanness upon every part, and reigns supremely over every power and every faculty of man. True, the man is not always conscious of his slavery. It is one of the most cunning secrets of his power, that he persuades his vassals they are free, and their offended language to any one who questions the fact is—"We be Abraham's children, and were never in bondage to any man." He brands them as his own; and then, content to wear his badge, they may choose their own trappings. He has no uniform. Some of his soldiers are in rags, and others in purple, and his very choicest veterans have stolen the livery of heaven. There is not one within the compass of the whole human family who is not by nature subject to his authority—naturally led captive by the devil at his will.

And then, this government of Satan over the human soul is not only despotic, but degrading. Slavery, in any form, is essentially connected with degradation; and in the case before us, the connection must be regarded as the most palpable and emphatic of all. The essence and exultation of moral dignity are assimilations to the image of God. Whatever recedes from that image must of necessity debase and degrade. Now the course of man's life, as it has been ever since the fall—a course of constant and increasing recession from God—presents a spectacle of moral degradation which is grievous to behold. The whole nature has fallen; the understanding

has become darkened, and is conversant only with what is contemptible and low; the affections, which once soared sublimely upward, now cleave to worldly objects, objects that perish in their using; the passions have become loyal servants of the usurper, and keep their zealous patrol in the courtyard of his palace; the will which once inclined to good, is now fierce and greedy after evil; imagination revels in fondest dalliance with sin for its paramour; and conscience, intoxicated with opiate draughts, and in that intoxication smitten with paralysis, gazes hopelessly upon the desolation; or, if at times stirred by the spirit within, it breaks out with a paroxysm, and terrifies the man with its thunder, he is persuaded to regard it as the incoherence of some maudlin drunkard, or the ravings of some frantic madman. Such is the condition to which the usurpation of the evil one has reduced the human soul. It is first earthly, scraping its affluence or its pleasure together; and then, yet more degrading, there is the transformation that happened to Nebuchadnezzar—the heart of a man is taken out, and the heart of a beast is put in; and, as like grows to like, and as the process of assimilation is constantly going on, it grows into its master's image; the mark of the beast becomes more distinct and palpable; every feature stands confessed of Satan's obscene and loathsome likeness; and there is a living proof of the truth of the scale upon which Scripture has graduated man's increasing degeneracy—"First earthly, then sensual, then devilish." That is a fearful picture, is it not? Ah! you see the man, or his bacchanalian orgies, or his midnight prowl—but you do not see the fiend that dogs his steps and

goads him to destruction. You see the degradation of the nature that once bore the image of God—but you do not see the jibing, mocking demon that is behind. You trace intelligibly enough the infernal brand—but you cannot hear the peals of infernal laughter, as the arch-devil, looking down upon the soul that he has stormed, exults in the extremity of the disgrace, and glories in the pollution of the fallen.

The government of Satan over the human soul is not only despotic and degrading, but destructive. Sin and punishment are inseparably allied; the powers of darkness, although mysteriously permitted a certain amount of influence, are themselves in punishment—“reserved in chains under darkness until the judgment of the Great Day.” A man who transgresses, since no coercion comes upon the freedom of his will, must necessarily be regarded as wilful; he is under the curses of a violated law—nay, condemned altogether—for “the wrath of God abideth upon him.” God will “pour out indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; for there is no respect of persons with God.” I am speaking to unconverted sinners to-night; to some of refined and delicate sensibility, shocked at the ribaldry of the vulgar, and at the licentiousness of the profane. I tell you, there is no respect of persons with God. If you flee not to a high and mighty Redeemer, if you repose not in present reliance upon Christ—for you there remaineth nothing but a death, whose bitterest ingredient is that it can never die, but that it has eternity about it, eternity beyond it, and eternity

within it, and the curse of God upon it, fretting it and following it for ever.

Thank God, there is a promise of a perfect and delightful deliverance from this thralldom under which man has been groaning. Christ has come down on purpose to deliver and to ransom him, and he goeth forth conquering and to conquer. In the counsels of the eternal Godhead—in foresight of the temptation of Satan and of the thralldom and depravity of man—Christ undertook to work out a counteracting scheme, by which, in the beautiful language of ancient prophecy, the prey of the mighty should be taken away and the lawful captive delivered. The first intimation of this scheme was given just when the first shadow of sin swept over the world: “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” From that time there was a continued series of operations—in the good providence of God, perpetuated for thousands of years—all tending to the fulfilment of this original promise, and the achievement of this original plan. At last, in the fulness of time—the time by prophet seers foretold, and by believing saints expected—in the fulness of time, the Son of God was incarnated in the nature that had sinned, and then it was that the battle in earnest began.

Secondly. Look then at the Divine Saviour, “stronger than the strong man armed”—invested with far higher qualifications, and wielding far mightier power. And how is this? He is the babe in Bethlehem, the rejected wanderer, the arraigned rebel, the scourged and spit upon, the Nazarene, the crucified. But these are only voluntary submissions, and in the

deepest humiliation there slumbers Omnipotence within. "All power is given unto me, both in heaven and in earth;" and this power is all enlisted upon the side of salvation and of mercy. It is not the power of the lightning, that blasts while it brightens; it is not the power of the whirlwind, whose track is only known by the carnage and desolation that it leaves behind it. It is the power of the water rill, that drops and drops, and in its dropping melts the most stern and difficult of nature's forces; it is the power of the light—it flows in energetic silence; you cannot hear it as it flows, and yet it permeates and illumines all. He is strong, but he is strong to deliver; he is mighty, but, in his own powerful language, he is "mighty to save." It often happens—it used to do so more frequently than it does now—in the history of the strifes of nations, and of the harsh scenes of war, that the interest of spectators was drawn aside from the hostile ranks to two courageous champions, who separated themselves from opposing armies for single combat with each other; and the fate of armies appeared to the spectators as nothing compared with who should be the victor in this individual strife. Oh, conceive—if it were possible—a single combat between the rival princes of light and darkness, the grand, the transcendent, the immeasurable issue of which shall be the ruin or redemption of the human soul! I cannot limn it; I cannot bring it fairly before you. The subject is too mighty; and yet a thought or two may not inaptly illustrate the battle that is now before us.

See, then, the lists are spread; the champions are there. Eager angels crowd around, for they have an

interest in the strife, and they are anxious to tune their harps to the anthems of regeneration again. Exulting demons are there, flushed with high hopes they dare not name, that vaunt of a ruined universe and of a peopled hell. This is no gentle passage at arms; this is no gorgeous tournament, or mimic fight, or holiday review. The destinies of a world of souls are trembling in the balance now—depend for weal or woe upon the issue of this mortal strife.

The first grapple seems to have been in the temptation in the wilderness; for, at the commencement of our Saviour's public ministry, the enemy endeavoured to tempt the second Adam after the same fashion as he had tempted the first; and when wearied with labour, and exhausted with endurance and suffering from the pangs of hunger and of thirst, he brought before him a similar order of temptation to that which had been successful in the garden of Eden. Ah! but there was a mightier Adam in human flesh this time with whom he had to deal. Grasping the sword of the Spirit, with its trenchant blade he cut asunder the flimsy sophistries of the tempter's weaving, and the discomfited demon went baffled away; and angels came and ministered unto Jesus—fanned with their ambrosial wings his burning brow, and poured their offices of kindness upon his fatigued and sorrowing soul. Defeated, but not conquered, the enemy returned to the charge; and the next grapple was in the performance of miracles.

It is customary in ordinary warfare, you know, whenever a fortress is taken, for the conqueror to garrison it with some of his own soldiers, and leave

some trusty captain in charge. The enemy appears to have acted upon this plan; and in token of his usurped authority over the human race, he caused certain of his servants to enter into the bodies of men. When Christ came into the world, they brought unto him those that were grievously vexed with devils. He sat down before some of these Sebastopols of the Evil One, and speaking with authority, he at once dislodged the intruders; and as—some in moody silence, and others with piteous cries—they rushed out from the places they had agonized, we can trace in their complaining the confession of their defeat—“What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come to torment us before the time?”

The next was the death-grapple. And was the champion smitten? Did he bend beneath that felon's stroke? Was there victory at last for the powers of hell? Imagine, if you can, how there would be joy in the breast of the Evil One, when the Saviour expired; how he would exult at that victory which had more than recompensed the struggle of four thousand years. Hours roll on: he makes no sign; day and night succeed each other; there is no break upon their slumber; their victory appears complete and final. Shall no one undeceive them? No; let them enjoy their triumph as they may. It were cruel to disturb a dream like that, which will have so terrible an awaking. But we, brethren—with the light of eighteen hundred years streaming down upon that gory field—understand the matter better. He died, of course, for only thus could death be abolished; he was counted with transgressors, of course, for thus only

could sin be forgiven ; he was made a curse for us, of course, because thus only could he turn the curse into a blessing. Oh, to faith's enlightened sight there is a surpassing glory upon that cross ! He was never so kingly as when girt about with that crown of thorns ; there was never so much royalty upon that regal brow as when he said, " It is finished "—and he died.

There only remains one more grapple. That was in the rising from the dead and ascension into heaven. It is considered the principal glory of a conqueror, you know, not merely that he repels the aggressive attacks of his enemy, but when he carries the war into that enemy's camp and makes him own himself vanquished in the metropolis of his own empire. This Christ did by concealing himself for a while within the chambers of the grave. We cannot tell you much about the battle, for it was a night attack, it took place in darkness ; but we can tell the issue, because on the morning of the third day the sepulchre was empty, and the Redeemer had gone forth into Galilee. This was only like the garnering up of the fruits of the conflict. The cross had settled it. It was finished when he said it was, upon the cross ; but this was a sudden surprise in the camp, when the guards were drawn off, and the soldiers carousing in the flush of fancied victory. By death he had abolished death ; him that had the power of death. By his resurrection he spoiled principalities and powers ; and then he went up, that he might " make a show of them openly." You can almost follow him as he goes, and as the challenge is given when he rises and nears the

gates of the celestial city—"Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength." And then comes the answer—"I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."

"And through the portals wide outspread
The vast procession pours."

And on he marches through the shining ranks of the ransomed, until he gets to the throne and points to the captives of his bow and spear, and claims his recompense. And "there is silence in heaven;" and there is given unto him "a name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow," and "every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." It is finished. Now he rests from his labours, and now he sheathes his sword, and now he wears his crown.

Thirdly. Just a word or two upon the victory that he gained. It was complete; it was benevolent; it was unchanging.

The attack which the Saviour made upon the enemy was such as to tear away the very sources and energies of his power. Mark how each fresh onset, whether from earth or hell, has only enhanced his glory and brightened the conqueror's crown. He

vanquished in his own person by dying, and in the person of his followers he has continued to manifest that indestructible energy, which was always manifest just when it seemed to be overthrown. Why, at the commencement of Christianity, would not any one have thought that a breath would annihilate it and exterminate the name of its founder for ever? And there they were—Cæsar on the throne, Herod on the bench, Pilate in the judgment hall, Caiaphas in the temple, priests and soldiers, Jews and Romans—all united together to crush the Galilean; and the Galilean overcame. And so it has been in all ages until now. Persecution has lifted up her head against the truth; war-wolves have lapped up the blood of God's saints, and for a time silenced the witness of confessors; and the testimony of the faithful has gone upward amid the crackling of fagots, and the ascending flame has been the chariot of fire in which rising Elijahs have mounted to heaven. And not merely is the completeness of this triumph manifested in the aggregate, but in the individual. Not only is every man brought into a salvable state, but every part of every man is redeemed. The poor body is not forgotten; it is taught to cast off the grave-clothes and anticipate an everlasting residence in heaven. The mind crouches no longer; it emancipates itself from its vassalage, and stands erect in the liberty wherewith Christ made it free; and the whole man—who was a while ago an alien, degraded and desolate, a fitting companion of the beast in his lair, a worthy follower in the serpent's trail—is now "clothed and in his right mind," careering along in the enterprises of godliness, a

fellow-citizen with saints, and of the household of God.

And then the triumphs of the Saviour are benevolent too.

Tell me not of human glory; it is a prostituted word. Tell me not of Agincourt, and Cressy, and Waterloo, and of the high places of Moloch-worship, where men have been alike both priests and victims. One verse of the poet aptly describes them all:

“Last noon beheld them full of lusty life,
Last eve in beauty's circle proudly gay.
The midnight brought the signal sound of strife;
The morning marshalling in arms; the day
Battle's magnificently stern array.
The thunder-clouds close o'er it, which, when rent,
The earth is covered thick with other clay,
Which her own clay shall cover, heaped and pent,
Rider and horse, friend and foe, in one red burial bleut.”

But what is it to be seen in the time of the Lord's victory? Plains covered with traces of recent carnage, and of recent havoc? What is there to be heard in the time of the Lord's victory? Orphans wailing the dead; widows bemoaning those that have departed? No, but a voice breathing down a comfortable word to men—“They shall neither hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.” The procession of this Conqueror consists of saved souls, and eternity shall consecrate the scene.

And then the triumphs of the Saviour are not only complete and benevolent, but unchanging. The things that are now, are very transitory. The sand of the desert is not more unstable; the chaff of the summer threshing-floor is not more helpless on the wind.

But the Saviour's triumphs brighten with the lapse of time; their lustre time can tarnish not, nor death itself destroy. Oh, think of the multitude that have been already saved! think of the multitude who went up in the early ages of the Church, with its enrichments of blessings; think of those who had been taken off to heaven before they ever had time to sin after the similitude of Adam's transgression—souls ransomed by the blood of atonement, taken from birth under the wing of the ascending cherub, right away into the realms of blessedness and rest; think of those, from the time of the Saviour's incarnation until now, who have passed through death triumphant home; think of the multitudes now upon earth, that are working out their salvation with fear and trembling; think of the still greater multitudes that shall yet press into the Church in the times of its millennial glory, when the gates of it shall not be shut day nor night, because there shall be no chance of shutting them, the people crowding in so fast. Oh, what a jubilee in heaven! Oh, what a gathering of emancipated spirits! Limit the extent of the atonement! Who dares do it? Talk about Christ dying for a few scattered families of the sons of men merely! Why, it is to charge my Saviour with cowardice, and bring a slur upon his conduct in the field. If there be one solitary soul the wide universe through for whom Christ did not die—over that soul death has triumphed, and the conquest of my Saviour is imperfect and incomplete. Oh, he seems to stand in his triumphal chariot, in the very centre of the universe, with exulting heaven before and with tormented hell

behind; while the glad hallelujahs of [the one, and the solemn acquiescences of the other, peal out the universe's anthem—"He is Lord of all!"

And now, on which side are you? Pardon the abruptness of the question, but answer it to your consciences and to your God notwithstanding. On which side are you? There is no neutrality in this war; or if there be one here that intends to preserve a dastardly neutrality, he will get the hottest of the battle, and be exposed to the cross-fire of both sides. On which side are you? Do you belong to the Lord, or to the Lord's enemies? Ask yourselves that question in the sight of God. I never knew—until I looked upon it in this aspect—the force and power of a certain question which the Saviour presented in the days of his flesh. I have admired the capacities of the human soul, that it has a memory that can recall the past, and imagination that can penetrate the future; that it has a will that no man can tame; that it has immortality as its heritage. But I see all heaven in earnest there, and all hell in earnest yonder, and the prize of the conflict is one poor human soul; and then I see, as I never saw before, what an intensity of emphasis there is in the awful inquiry—"What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Brethren, how shall it be with you? "Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God;" and the doom of the enemies of God is brought before us in the Bible: "Bring hither those mine enemies that would not I should reign over them, and slay them before me." On which side are you? There is one passage that I

should just like to bring before you, which has always appeared to me to be one of the most fearful in the whole compass of the book of God: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man"—mark, it does not say when he is driven out; it does not say when he is dispossessed by superior powers; but the awful idea, almost too awful to be entertained, is, that there are some people in this world of ours of whom Satan is so sure, that he can leave them for a while, perfectly certain that they will sweep and garnish his house in his absence, and prepare it for seven other spirits more inveterate and cruel—"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return unto my house." Oh, mockery of that quiet empire! "*To my house.*" The tenancy has not changed; he knows full well there is too much love of the master's service in the heart of the man for that. "I will return unto my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." Oh, horrible! horrible! Not merely to have Satan as a guest, but to sweep and garnish the house that he may come in, and that he may bring with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself. And are you doing that? Is there one in the presence of God to-night to whom this awful passage will apply? Oh, I thank God that I can preach to you a present salvation in the name of Jesus. Be delivered from that

bondage of yours, for Christ has come down on purpose that he may deliver; and that he may rescue, he goeth forth conquering and to conquer. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." There is salvation for you from the power of death, and from the thralldom and ascendancy of besetting sin, and from the grasp of the destroyer. There is salvation for you in Christ Jesus the Lord. Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost of human guilt, to the uttermost of human life, to the uttermost of human time. May God help you, for Christ's sake.

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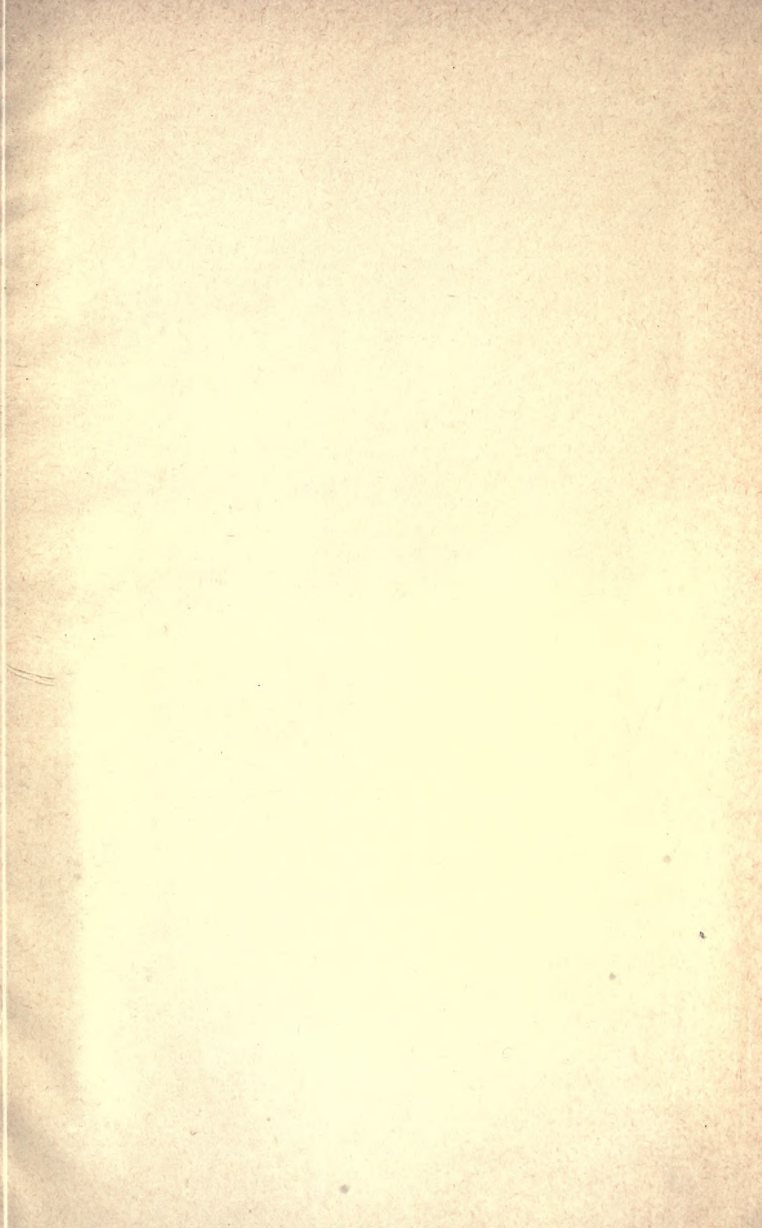
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